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# The Journal of Christian Reconstruction



Symposium on  
Christianity and  
the American Revolution

A CHALCEDON PUBLICATION

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## The Journal of Christian Reconstruction

Volume 3 / Number 1

Summer 1976

*Symposium on Christianity and the American Revolution*

Gary North, Editor

A CHALCEDON MINISTRY

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# THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION

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This journal is dedicated to the fulfillment of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 and 9:1—to subdue the earth to the glory of God. It is published by the Chalcedon Foundation, an independent Christian educational organization (see inside back cover). The perspective of the journal is that of orthodox Christianity. It affirms the verbal, plenary inspiration of the original manuscripts (autographs) of the Bible and the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus Christ—two natures in union (but without intermixture) in one person.

The editors are convinced that the Christian world is in need of a serious publication that bridges the gap between the newsletter-magazine and the scholarly academic journal. The editors are committed to Christian scholarship, but the journal is aimed at intelligent laymen, working pastors, and others who are interested in the reconstruction of all spheres of human existence in terms of the standards of the Old and New Testaments. It is not intended to be another outlet for professors to professors, but rather a forum for serious discussion within Christian circles.

The Marxists have been absolutely correct in their claim that theory must be united with practice, and for this reason they have been successful in their attempt to erode the foundations of the noncommunist world. The editors agree with the Marxists on this point, but instead of seeing in revolution the means of fusing theory and practice, we see the fusion in personal regeneration through God's grace in Jesus Christ and in the extension of God's kingdom. Good principles should be followed by good practice; eliminate either, and the movement falters. In the long run, it is the kingdom of God, not Marx's "kingdom of freedom," which shall reign triumphant. Christianity will emerge victorious, for only in Christ and His revelation can men find both the principles of conduct and the means of subduing the earth—the principles of Biblical law.

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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*Gary North*

What should we call the events occurring in the American colonies between 1776 and 1783? The American Revolution? The War for Independence? The American Counter-Revolution? The English saw the period as a true revolution, and so did the colonial loyalists. The Patriot Party saw it as a war for colonial independence and a return to traditional English liberties. The revolutionary nature of the period has been debated by scholars ever since they began to look into the historical details. The contrast between the French Revolution and the American Revolution has fascinated conservative scholars for almost two centuries. The American experience lacked the ideology, the elements of terror, the political centralization, the break with political traditions, the reshaping of law, the conscript armies, and the mass executions of the French Revolution. Edmund Burke, the politician-scholar who served in the English Parliament in the latter part of the eighteenth century, recognized the differences between the two revolutions. He acknowledged the legitimacy of the criticisms made by the colonists, even when such support was politically unpopular, but he was savage in his critique of the French Revolution. Conservative commentators have followed Burke's lead and have described our experience as a conservative counterrevolution.

The tasks of the historian are complex, never-ending, and ultimately religious in nature. He must discover documents, place them in their historical context (including dating them), assess their authenticity from internal and external evidence, assess their importance at the time they were in circulation, classify them, compare them with other documents, compare the evaluation of other historians with his own and with each other, and combine his narrative into a coherent, readable format that should satisfy the tests of clarity, accuracy, and balance. This process involves artistry. The writing of history cannot be assigned to a computer. "Weighing the evidence" is a distinctly non-computational operation. The historian must constantly shift from one

task to the other: checking his hypothesis with the available documents; keeping track of the latest findings of his peers, as well as the findings of past historians; and rethinking his earlier interpretations of the historical setting and the meaning of the document in question. The facts of history are not autonomous. They do not “speak for themselves.” They are the product of a set of {2} conditions. But which set? What weight should be given to any particular document? How does an investigator discover whether he has assigned the proper weight to a document? Must he overemphasize a neglected or rejected interpretation in order to correct a prevailing misinterpretation of the period by other historians?

What criteria can be used to sort out the historical facts and analyze them? What classifications can be suggested that would enable us to categorize the period? The contributors to this issue of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* have offered several helpful approaches to the solution of this historical problem. We can ask any of the following questions:

- Who were the colonial leaders?
- Where did they get their ideas?
- What was their basic motivation?
- What motivated their followers?
- How should we interpret their language?
- How did they view the king? How did they view Parliament?
- How did they view the colonial legislatures?
- How did they view law?
- Which thinkers influenced the leaders?
- What religious principles did the leaders espouse?
- What religious principles did the public espouse?
- How did the colonists view the church-state relationship?
- How influential was Deism in the colonies?
- Did the European Enlightenment influence the colonists?
- Was the American Revolution really a revolution?

**Archie Jones** presents the case for the War for Independence as a distinctly Christian enterprise. The fact that the colonial leaders quoted John Locke—himself an Arminian Christian, not a Deist—or used the seemingly secular language of “Nature” and “Nature’s God,” does not prove that the war was basically secular. The events that we sometimes term a revolution do not compare with those of the French Revolution of 1789–95. In contrast to the French Revolution, the



American experience was limited in its scope and its political goals, and hostile to political centralization. Culturally and religiously, the colonies were overwhelmingly Protestant. It was a homogeneous society. The historic and religious origins of the war were distinctively Calvinistic—covenantal, anti-statist, nonutopian, distrustful of human nature, and law oriented. Locke was cited by the leaders, but he was cited selectively. Far more important than Locke was the Great Awakening, the religious revivals that swept over the colonies for two decades after 1740. The Great Awakening created a sense of national unity. This, in turn, helped to foster resentment against the expanding power of the British Parliament. Without {3} Christianity, in short, the War for Independence would not have been fought.

**John Robbins** outlines the central doctrines of colonial political philosophy. Foremost was the distrust of human nature. This suspicion led to a distrust of centralized political power. The Founders were republicans, defenders of representative government, a system of checks and balances within government, a wide dispersal of political power, and limited civil government. They believed in natural rights, by which they meant God-given natural rights, a concept at odds with the natural rights humanism of the European Enlightenment. The sources of their political ideas were varied: Greek and Roman history, the modified logic of Enlightenment rationalism, John Locke, David Hume, and the writings of Calvinism, both Continental and Puritan. Their commitment to the idea of human evil kept them from indulging in humanistic utopian schemes.

**R. J. Rushdoony** continues the theme that the European Enlightenment had no roots in the colonies. Their Deism was mild, when held, and very few colonists held to the position. Even their Deism was covered by the language of Protestant orthodoxy. It was Arminianism rather than Deism which was the primary rival of colonial Calvinism. The roots of American history of this period were theological.

**J. Murray Murdoch** surveys recent American historiography and finds that the Marxists, the New Left historians, and other economic determinists cannot explain the deeply conservative aspects of the War for Independence. It was a middle-class movement, not elitist. The war was primarily a conflict over constitutional issues, the most fundamental being the relationship of the British Parliament to the colonial legis-

latures, i.e., the locus of political sovereignty. Their cry was the “traditional rights of Englishmen,” not “crush the accursed thing,” Voltaire’s slogan against Christianity. The goal of total separation from England came quite late—over a year after the fighting had begun. They wanted only to defend traditional rights against the encroachments of the British Parliament and the British bureaucracy. A “foreign” Parliament was not acceptable to the Patriot leaders after 1774. Murdoch cites the *Declaration of the Causes & Necessity of Taking Up Arms* (1775) as an important but neglected source document of the era, which is reproduced immediately following his introduction.

My own contribution focuses on the language, background, and implications of the *Declaration of Independence*, which is reprinted after my article. Its primary focus was not on the rights of man; instead, the bulk of the Declaration was concerned with specific abuses by the king. This, however, was a smoke screen. The real culprit was Parliament, but for purposes of foreign policy, Jefferson spelled out his objections against {4} the monarch. The Declaration was above all a foreign policy document. It was almost immediately forgotten. The Adams-Jefferson presidential campaigns of 1796 and 1800 referred back to the Declaration, since Jefferson’s Democrats claimed that he was the sole author, despite the fact that Adams had served as one of the five members of the committee which drafted the document. It was again neglected until the slavery controversy began in 1819, when abolitionists appealed to “all men are created equal” to justify their critique of the Constitution. Far from being a radical document, the Declaration was conservative: law oriented, specific in its criticisms, and non-utopian. This is why conservative cleric John Witherspoon could sign it.

**Cecil Currey** summarizes his deliberately neglected book, *Code Number 72*, a heavily documented study of the machinations of Benjamin Franklin during his years as a colonial representative in Paris. The evidence points to a startling conclusion: Franklin may have been a double agent. At the very least, he was unwilling to take steps that would have stopped the continual leaks of information from his office to the British. He employed men who were spies as staff assistants, even after he had been warned about their British connections. Franklin was cunning, unscrupulous, and a manipulator. The Franklin legend was first created by Franklin, step by deliberate step; it has been followed by

most of the professional historians since 1789, especially those whose humanistic presuppositions impel them to extol the virtues of their ideological kinsman—one of the few of the leaders of 1776 who shared these presuppositions.

**Mark Wyndham** surveys the issue of religious freedom in Western civilization and then concentrates his attention on the colonial scene. He concludes that the fear among colonists concerning the possibility of the establishment of an Anglican bishop—a bishop dominated by Parliament—was a very real fear in the eighteenth century. Men did fear the coming of religious despotism. The Great Awakening had brought religious freedom, and the colonists were not about to abandon the principle. **Edward Coleson** takes a different approach: not possessing the religious roots found in our historical inheritance, no revolution in South America has been successful in imitating our democratic political order. The substance of our system is self-restraint in terms of fundamental law. The Bible served as a warning to the American colonists against the dangers of lawless kings and lawless courts. Finally, **E. L. Hebden Taylor**, a recently naturalized American citizen, points to the similarities between American history and the Old Testament history. He warns that similar sins produce similar judgments. The massive secular states of today threaten to lead directly to tyranny, failure, and judgment.

The secular historians who have dominated the writing and teaching {5} of history for a century have obscured the roots of our past. There have been exceptions, most notably the writings of Perry Miller and his students, but on the whole, the textbooks in high schools and colleges still fail to devote sufficient attention to the theological foundations of the early period of America. Until there are more accurate textbooks available, the myths of the American Revolution will distort the perception of our past. Christian reconstruction involves the reconstruction and revision of historiography, especially American historiography.

**1.**  
**SYMPOSIUM ON**  
**CHRISTIANITY**  
**AND THE AMERICAN**  
**REVOLUTION**

# THE CHRISTIAN ROOTS OF THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE

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*Archie P. Jones*

During the last six decades, historians of the period marking our emergence and existence as a distinct people have too often viewed the motives that occasioned that famous separation from the mother country as fundamentally selfish. Nay, worse: it has become all too fashionable to view the fundamental motives of the American colonists' desire for independence as self-interested in the narrow or egoistic sense, secular and even base. Though a look at the darker side of the men who led and fought the War for Independence (and who thereby laid the basis for the founding of the United States) provided by the turn-of-the-century "debunking" historians and their latter-day disciples has had the beneficial effect of helping us to understand the persistence of certain fundamental flaws in human nature, the revisionism of the "debunkers" has also had *its* darker side, one of the manifestations of which is a certain popular (not to mention scholarly!) cynicism toward the people and the leaders who fought the "Revolution" and who laid the foundations of America.<sup>1</sup> This cynicism is both the product and the cause of a profound misunderstanding of the dominant views of colonial Americans, and of their intentions in undertaking

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1. That the achievement of independence and the founding of the American regime are not necessarily the same is reflected in the longstanding scholarly dispute over whether the Declaration or the Constitution is to be taken as our original and fundamental political testament. See, for example, the six essays collected in Willmoore Kendall and George W. Carey, eds., *Liberalism Versus Conservatism: The Continuing Debate in American Government* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Co. Inc., 1968), 3–60. Because the Constitution was based on greater public and private deliberation, and because it was ratified by the people, and because the Declaration did not intend to establish one nation, fully equipped with a government, it seems clear that we must turn to the former document to study the founding. However, the basic continuity of principle and view between the two documents is greater than the dissimilarity between them.

that celebrated enterprise. Revisionists of the debunking type see the driving forces behind (or perhaps *underneath*) the independence movement as economic or commercial self-interest,<sup>2</sup> social and political self-interest (the desires of many to advance themselves in status and privilege at the expense of a portion of the colonial aristocracy),<sup>3</sup> or political, in the narrow, {7} nationalistic sense (the desire of a people to exercise uninterrupted control over its corporate affairs and destiny). In any case, the arguments advanced by the conflicting parties to the dispute are seen by debunkers as merely subterfuges by means of which to advance the real interests of the given group,<sup>4</sup> or at best as peripheral issues.

With the recent intellectual popularity of positivist assumptions of the unknowable nature of moral values, and of Marxist assumptions of the economic basis of human thought patterns, the debunking variety of revisionism has achieved something of the status of orthodoxy. But its orthodoxy is not an unchallenged one, for those whom Roche<sup>5</sup> denigrates as “political philosophers, historians of ideas, intellectual historians, legal antiquarians, mystics, and gnostics, all working away at their particular vocations,” have amassed numerous volumes arguing that the Revolution<sup>6</sup> was, to a very large degree, the product of men’s metaphysical considerations.<sup>7</sup> {8}

These categories are not intended to be airtight; nor should the student of the Revolution suppose that the role of ideas, or social and eco-

2. The classic exponent of this view, of course, is Charles Beard. See also Louis M. Hacker, “The First American Revolution,” *Columbia University Quarterly* 27, no. 3, part 1 (September 1935). Such a view is assumed in numerous history and government texts, both of the New Left and milder varieties.

3. The original work on this is J. Franklin Jameson, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1926). See also Arthur M. Schlesinger, “The American Revolution Reconsidered,” *Political Science Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (March 1919): 61–78, a view which may be seen as a synthesis of the economic with the social view, or as a milder expression of the later view of John Roche. Paul Eidelberg, *A Discourse on Statesmanship: An Enquiry into the Design and Transformation of the American Polity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 6–17, has convincingly argued that such socioeconomic interpretations of the founding are based on quasi-Marxist premises, *and* on a fundamentally erroneous interpretation of the intentions (and to some degree the achievement) of the Founders. As we shall see, the same could be said of the War for Independence.

conomic circumstances, or human passions can be perfectly separated—or eliminated—as factors in human action. This consideration, however, does not remove the issue separating the behavioral or “debunking” revisionists and their more (visibly) metaphysically oriented counterparts: wherein lie the more fundamental causes of men’s actions? Do men act on their fundamental ideas or convictions about the nature of the world or reality? Or do men really adapt themselves pragmatically to the changes and circumstances which they discern or sense in their environment? Wright was not far from the truth when he said that “at no time since 1774 has there been agreement on either the ‘facts’ of the Revolution or on its ‘causes’; everything has depended on the background and standpoint of the teller of the tale.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet, while Wright’s remark is in a sense true, it obscures a more basic agreement among the majority<sup>9</sup> of writers on both sides of this dispute: both behaviorist “debunkers” and metaphysical “idealists” are *revisionists*. Both groups essentially depart from the prevailing scholarly consensus of the early nineteenth century, a consensus which ascribed the

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4. Of this description is H. E. Egerton, *The Causes and Character of the American Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923). Contemporary liberal group-interest theorist John P. Roche, “American Liberty: An Examination of the ‘Tradition’ of Freedom,” in Roche, ed., *Origins of American Political Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 15–58, should also be mentioned. Roche is of special interest not only because, as a group-interest theorist, he sees metaphysical or religious arguments as irrelevant, but also because, as a positivist, he can discern no intellectual or moral criteria on the basis of which to distinguish between competing values, and thus, since he cannot know how men should behave, he defines freedom in the Hobbesian sense—as the absence of restraint on the individual’s actions, a definition positively hostile to the traditional American understanding of the concept.

In this group should also be included those whom Esmond Wright has designated “Imperialists” and “Progressives.” For a fuller review of the historical literature on the subject see Wright’s bibliographical essay, “Historians and the Revolution,” in Wright, ed., *Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), 15–51.

5. Roche, *ibid.*, 8.

6. I have used the terms “War for Independence” and “Revolution” interchangeably, as both are used to describe the same phenomena. The former designation appears in the title, however, to indicate my agreement with the thesis of Burke, the Whigs, and the colonists: that the “Revolution” was essentially a conservative counterrevolution, aimed at defending traditional rights against an assertion of absolute power.

foundational principles of America in general, and of the Revolution in particular, to Christianity, or, to be more precise, to the *Calvinistic Christianity* dominant in the heritage of those who had migrated to the colonies from the Old World. Though the earlier consensus was formulated in the heyday of Protestant America, it was by no means attributable solely to orthodox Protestants or to Calvinists. Unitarians, Romantic Hegelians, and Roman Catholics, for example, agreed with their Protestant contemporaries that {9} America was founded on the basis of the teachings of John Calvin.<sup>10</sup> Such a conclusion was founded upon, among other things, an observation of the basic *religious homogeneity* of the American people, a homogeneity noted in the second number of *The Federalist* and still evident to Tocqueville in the 1830s, at which time, we are told, Christianity reigned as the unquestioned public orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup> But the religious homogeneity of which Tocqueville wrote in the 1830s is no more.

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7. Of the former description are Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Clinton Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1953); David W. Minar, *Ideas and Politics: The American Experience* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1964); Benjamin F. Wright, *Consensus and Continuity, 1776–1787* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1958). Representative of the latter description are George Bancroft, *History of the United States*, vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1834–74; Harcourt, Brace & World, [1927] 1958), 179–94; Merrill Jensen, “Democracy and the American Revolution,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 20 (1957): 321–41; Gordon S. Wood, “Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution,” *The William & Mary Quarterly* 23 (1966): 3–32, who seemingly argues for a synthesis of “behaviorist” and “idealist” theses on the Revolution, founded on the basis of social psychology. Even Roche himself can also be seen as in this category, since he evaluates the impetus toward the unbounded tolerance which he understands as “freedom” as good. Thus, in the widest sense, this subcategory encompasses even the would-be morally “neutral” socioeconomic interpreters who pronounce on the goodness or badness of either the events or the actions and motives of the men which they chronicle.

8. Esmond Wright, *Causes and Consequences*, 15.

9. Only “majority” because commentators taking the third position adumbrated herein may also be properly included within the category of “metaphysical revisionists.”

10. See Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., [1932] 1972), 382–99.



Since man, on his own authority, proclaimed himself autonomous during the Renaissance,<sup>12</sup> the main drift of Western theoretical thought has necessarily been increasingly secular. Modern man, presupposing his own centrality and self-sufficiency, has been unwilling to grant to God that which man's reason or sentiment deems unfitting. Thus, the way has been left open for "progressively" removing God from having an integral, decisive, or even influential role in the cosmos and world. Adoption of a second fundamental modern presupposition—in the deepest sense, in the biblical {10} sense, derived from the

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11. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: Doubleday & Co., Anchor Books, 1969), 292. Tocqueville's observation on a later America is ignored by most secularizers of the Revolution. Perhaps this omission is due to an assumption of a roughly linear progress in American history—if not in history itself—according to which the outmoded "superstition" of Christianity—and certainly of the Calvinistic variety of Christianity—is (and *should be*) replaced by more "enlightened" forms of thought, until we progressively arrive at that pinnacle of knowledge and wisdom embodied in the orthodoxy of our own day. Thus Calvinism should be replaced by Arminianism, Arminianism by Deism, Deism by Unitarianism, Unitarianism by Transcendentalism, and so forth. To a large extent this in fact occurred, but it is another question whether this succession of events constituted progress, and still another question whether it occurred as rapidly as is usually assumed.

Not all historians, of course, arrive at these conclusions from modern presuppositions. For a Christian view, see C. Gregg Singer's otherwise outstanding *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1964). Martin Diamond is the outstanding example of a political scientist who begins from decidedly antimodern presuppositions but still obscures the Christian origins of the founding of America. See his famous essay, "Democracy and the *Federalist*: A Reconsideration of the Founders' Intent," *American Political Science Review* (March 1959): 52–68. Diamond's thesis contradicts the remark of his mentor, Leo Strauss, that America is the only contemporary Western nation not founded on modern principles. Strauss mentioned that the Puritans, for example, were emphatically not modern.

12. Crane Brinton, *Ideas and Men: The Story of Western Thought* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950), 256–97, 334–97. It should be noted that this proclamation of the self-sufficiency of man's mind is an *a priori* assumption about the nature of reality: though taken as axiomatic, it is nevertheless, whether in its classical or modern form, without proof. If this presupposition is true, of course, man need not submit to the stern discipline of revelation. For more on presuppositional thinking and modern presuppositions, see Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969) and Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972).

first—made “certain” what was implied in the first: a presupposed universe which is a *uniformity of natural causes*, and operating within a closed system, “removed” the possibility of divine intervention. The validity of this presupposition and the irrelevance of religion to truth was *seemingly* substantiated by the findings of modern science.<sup>13</sup> Then came the third dominant modern presupposition, that the universe and all the personal beings (including man) observable within it are the products of the operations of blind chance, over tremendous periods of time, on a thoroughly impersonal primal and eternally existing matter or energy. Acceptance of this presupposition in the late nineteenth century hastened the intellectual popularity of a conclusion reached in the Renaissance by such eminent and influential thinkers as Machiavelli,<sup>14</sup> and in the seventeenth century by Hobbes: the universe is devoid of any transcendent, objective moral values. Since nature is, for modern thought, not only closed to providential divine intervention but also non-teleological (not ends oriented), modern intellectuals have been led to the conclusion that man’s reason and observation cannot discover anything above and beyond a pragmatic awareness of the modes of acquiring and retaining power. If there are to be *values*, they must be, in the final analysis, *arbitrary creations of men*, applicable per-

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13. This conclusion is possible only so long as one operates within the framework of the presuppositions of modern thought. For an introductory survey of the origins of these, see Francis Schaeffer, *ibid.*, and his *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who Is There*, both (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968). For a fuller treatment, particularly of the problems of empirical science generated by the conjunction of science with modern and humanistic presuppositions, see Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1971), and *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1964). For a stimulating and controversial view on the applicability of the methods of the physical sciences to the study of man, see Leo Strauss, “An Epilogue,” in Herbert J. Storing, ed., *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1962), 305–27.

14. Of the literature on Machiavelli and Hobbes, the two best works, both from a Platonist perspective, are Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958) and *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). On modern political thought in general, see John H. Hallowell, *Main Currents in Modern Political Thought* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston [1950] 1963).

haps for a given historical time and place, but subject to abandonment with changes in place or time; hence, they are conventional and enforceable by custom, state-controlled education, and various forms of coercion, but they cannot be morally binding.

Moreover, the modern naturalistic presuppositions have inevitably led men to explain man in terms of the lower, not the higher.<sup>15</sup> As Schaeffer has pointed out, the logical development of modern naturalism has led {11} men to see nature as a gigantic machine, and man himself as not only caught up in the machinery but himself a machine, the functioning of which is determined by heredity, environment, or psychological development.<sup>16</sup> The popular success of Darwinian evolutionary speculation has reinforced man's low view of himself: no longer a creature created in the image of God, but merely a chance product of successful mutations, themselves the product of chance, from an original, accidental concatenation of atoms in a blind and meaningless universe. The teachings of Freud have furthered this degrading process by explaining the behavior of the adult in terms of the gratifications and traumas of the child, an explanation applied by the influential behaviorist Harold Lasswell to politics.<sup>17</sup> These teachings have had a profound impact on modern intellectuals, and thus on modern man. Like the teachings of Marx, these ideas originated in the "Enlightenment,"<sup>18</sup> and are traceable to man's assumption of his own autonomy in the Renaissance.

Awareness of some of the central themes of modern thought should help us to understand some of the reasons why many modern scholars

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15. A point frequently made by Straussians. See the works of Strauss cited in *ibid.* This development also has a direct relationship to the recent resurgence of all manner of Satanic phenomena; on this, see Rousas John Rushdoony, "Power from Below," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 1 (Winter 1974): 7–10.

16. See Schaeffer, especially *Escape from Reason*.

17. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Freud* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), 9 and passim.

18. The evolutionary hypothesis, of course, has long been under attack by Christian scholars, both as to presuppositions and methodology, not to mention lack of evidence. It is beginning to experience further intellectual hostility from non-biblical perspectives. See R. F. Baum, "Coming to Grips with Darwin," *Intercollegiate Review* 11 (Fall 1975): 13–24.

have been led to obscure—or omit altogether—the Christian origins of the Revolution. The main thrust of modern thought has been a flight from Christianity’s view of man and the universe, a flight which has led many to assume that Christianity is not only untrue and outmoded, but also intellectually disreputable and even dangerous. Such notions have been aided by what Richard Weaver called “provincialism in time,” itself a product of the eighteenth-century idea of progress and nineteenth-century evolutionary speculation. Add to this, first, the inability of professing Christians (both at the time of the Revolution and now) to reach a consensus of some of the fundamentals of the faith; second, a certain eclecticism by many men of the revolutionary generation;<sup>19</sup> and third, the presence in colonial America of a quite diverse heritage drawn from ancient, medieval, Reformation, and modern thinkers,<sup>20</sup> and the difficulties confronting the historian become comprehensible. {12}

Both the diversity and the content of the colonial heritage played an integral role in avoiding the universalistic messianism, not to mention the degradation and savage violence, of the French Revolution. But the richness of this heritage did not lead the colonists astray from their position. Burnham’s comment on the Founding Fathers might well be applied to the partisans of independence:

... the Fathers were the masters, not the victims, of these inherited ideas, and sometimes it is the rhetoric more than the ideas that is taken over. The Fathers were protected from ideology not only by piety and a native skepticism toward abstract reason, but [by] their persistent sense of fact, of the specific. The phrases of Locke, Montesquieu, Cicero and the others often figured in the Philadelphia debates, but they were never divorced from the specific problems that had brought the delegates together.<sup>21</sup>

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19. More on this point later. See Rousas John Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1964), 1–8.

20. The best work on this diverse heritage is Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974). Kirk acknowledges Protestant Christianity as the dominant source of the American order and tradition, but fails to set forth adequately its meanings and political implications. The classical tradition was also very strong, as is evident in *The Federalist*; see Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

The use of selected quotations from authoritative thinkers to buttress their own arguments need not lead to the conclusion that Americans were without principles, or were pragmatically seeking to buttress their own (narrow) self-interests. Neither should the tendency of some contemporary Christians toward escapism, nor the observable moral and philosophical inconsistencies of the people and their leaders, nor the failure of many outstanding men of the day to approximate the theological rigor of their Puritan forebears, lead the student of the period to conclude that either the people or a majority of their leaders were Deists or secular thinkers. The failure of George Washington to be the Reverend Cotton Mather does not remove the fact that the former, too, was a Christian, and declared: "... it is impossible to govern rightly without God and the Bible." Rushdoony has shown that the language of natural law and reason was by no means the monopoly of the "enlightened" thinkers of the day. Not only was Scholasticism in philosophy, which gave much authority to man's unaided reason, combined with Puritanism in theology, but Deism was of little influence in America before the Revolution, while "the language of Reason and Nature had a long philosophical and legal history and was by no means the property of any one school."<sup>22</sup> Even such notable figures as Franklin and Jefferson, usually supposed to be Deists, mixed vigorous affirmations of the reality of divine providence with rationalistic assumptions. The existence of such assertions would seem to be explained by the influence of the surrounding Christian culture on these men. The American "Enlightenment" {13} occurred long *after*, not before, the Revolution.<sup>23</sup>

A thorough discussion of the reasons for the exclusion of Christianity by modern historians from its prominent, perhaps even dominant, role in the American Revolution is necessarily a complex question, involving an examination of individual authors. It is beyond the scope of our attention here. One's perspective and presuppositions do play a

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21. James Burnham, *Congress and the American Tradition* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959). Gummere, *ibid.*, comes to the same conclusion with respect to classical thought.

22. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 2–4.

23. *Ibid.*, 5–8. Notice especially Franklin's plea for prayer in the Constitutional Convention, 5.

crucial role in determining his selection and evaluation of the evidence.<sup>24</sup> The evidence and insights provided by revisionists of both the debunking and the metaphysical schools have done much to broaden our view, in certain areas, of the war. Still, there is ample evidence to indicate that the attempted secularization of the colonists' motives inherent in the interpretations of the revisionists represents not only a lowering of the aims of the colonists, but also a defective evaluation of the evidence.

While mundane desires and secular theories were not absent from the prerevolutionary and revolutionary period, there is considerable evidence not only that higher purposes played an important part in bringing about and successfully completing the independence movement, but that those purposes were dominantly *Christian* purposes. The roots of the American War for Independence go deep into the history and tradition of the West, and its Christian roots are just as deep and extend nearly as wide. An adequate understanding of the meaning of the war or an appreciation of its fruits is impossible apart from a knowledge of its Christian roots, which extend deep into the medieval period, the Reformation, and the English tradition, and are strong enough to have influenced the whole tone of English and American society.

### *The People*

Among the Anglo-Americans there are some who profess Christian dogmas because they believe them and others who do so because they are afraid to look as though they did not believe them. So *Christianity reigns without obstacles, by universal consent*; consequently, as I have said elsewhere, *everything in the moral field is certain and fixed*, although the world of politics seems given over to argument and experiment. So the human spirit never sees an unlimited field before itself: however bold it is, from time to time it feels that it must halt before insurmountable barriers. Before innovating, it is forced to

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24. Among other things, ignorance (which, like original sin, plagues us all) seems to account for much of the neglect of Christianity's role in shaping the Revolution in particular and the American mind in general, but the possibility should also be seriously considered that to some scholars the Christian past is destructive, or at least not useful, to the present and future needs of "modern" America.

accept certain primary assumptions and to submit its boldest conceptions to certain formalities which retard and check it.<sup>25</sup> {14}

An adequate account of the causes of the American Revolution cannot begin without a consideration of the nature of its cultural setting. As Kirk has reminded us, that culture has roots running deep into classical antiquity, but its largest, deepest, and most extensive roots are Christian and reach back through colonial religious events and personalities to the Reformation and medieval Christianity. Despite the limited diversity of Christianity's expression in America, there was a great deal of cultural homogeneity:

If we call the American statesmen of the late eighteenth century the Founding Fathers of the United States, then the Pilgrims and Puritans were the grandfathers and Calvin the great-grandfather. In saying this, one need not exclude the Virginians because Anglicanism has essentially Calvinistic foundations still recognizable in the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Pilgrim Fathers, like the Puritans generally, represented a kind of re-reformed Anglicanism. Though the fashionable eighteenth century Deism may have pervaded some intellectual circles, the prevailing spirit of Americans before and after the War of Independence was essentially Calvinistic in both its brighter and uglier aspects. They were a hard-working, frugal, plain-spoken, intensely nationalistic people, aware and proud of their moral standards which included the "Protestant work ethic."<sup>26</sup>

Boettner, in the authoritative work on a controversial, but little understood and seldom studied Calvinistic doctrine, comments further:

It is estimated that of the 3,000,000 Americans at the time of the American Revolution, 900,000 were of Scotch or Scotch-Irish origin, 600,000 were Puritan English, and 400,000 were German or Dutch Reformed. In addition to this the Episcopalians and a Calvinistic confession in their Thirty-nine Articles; and many French Huguenots also came to this western world. Thus we see that about two-thirds of the colonial population had been trained in the school of Calvin.... Furthermore these people came to America not primarily for commercial gain or advantage, but because of deep religious convictions.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 292; emphasis added.

26. Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, "The Western Dilemma: Calvin or Rousseau?" *Modern Age* 15 (Winter 1971): 49.

Nor, one might add, is the presence of an economic motive—or even its dominance in an individual’s decision to emigrate—sufficient evidence to conclude either that a person is not a Christian or that he is a morally deficient one.

Ahlstrom says of the American colonies:

Among other things, they had become the most thoroughly Protestant, Reformed, and Puritan commonwealths in the world. Indeed, Puritanism provided the moral and religious background of fully 75 percent of the people who declared their independence in 1776.

And notes:

If one were to compute such a percentage on the basis of all the {15} German, Swiss, French, Dutch, and Scottish people whose forebearers bore the “stamp of Geneva” in some broader sense, 85 or 90 percent would not be an extravagant estimate.<sup>28</sup>

In light of these estimates, it is not difficult to imagine why so many earlier commentators and historians traced the causes of the revolution to Christianity. And despite the fact that one’s background is not necessarily a determinant of one’s theology, an interesting question is raised about what conditions—or presuppositions—are required to lead the student of the subject to discount the evidence of such estimates as irrelevant. This is especially so when one recalls the larger role played by religion in the America of those days, and the fact that *denominational divisions* created not a weakened religious zeal and a demand for unity among them on the basis of the lowest common denominator, but rather a *strengthened religious zeal*.<sup>29</sup> It is not even a necessary condition to the case for American colonial culture as dominantly Calvinistic that the percentages quoted above be transmitted intact from the Pilgrim Fathers to the Founding Fathers. The first fifteen to twenty years of the lives of many men were profoundly influenced by the church attendance and teaching imparted to them by their pastors and parents.<sup>30</sup> It is well known that Franklin was influenced by Cotton Mather’s *Essays to Do Good*, and Franklin’s call for prayer in the Consti-

27. Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine*, 382–83.

28. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Image Books, 1975), 169.

29. Kuehnelt-Leddihn, “Western Dilemma,” 49.



tutional Convention belies both his alleged Deism and that of the leaders of the Revolution. Add to this the well-known leadership of Calvinists in establishing educational institutions and especially colleges, and it is easy to see why *the whole tone of society was influenced by its dominant theology*.

So powerful was the influence of Calvinism in early America that even the few Roman Catholics present (twenty thousand at the time of the Revolution) took on many Calvinistic attributes:

American Catholics were for a long time, as shown in their puritanical ways, a tiny minority much influenced by the Protestant culture that surrounded them, their religious sobriety, their clericalism and legalism and total acceptance of Thomistic theology. They were at the same time culturally Calvinistic and intellectually medieval and this was the occasion of many misunderstandings between them and their Continental coreligionists. To many American and Irish-American Catholics the Italian immigrants seemed more pagan than Christian. Indeed, as Everett Dean Martin has pointed out, the American spirit was—and to a small extent still is—more medieval than modern.<sup>31</sup>

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The strength of this influence on Roman Catholics is striking, especially in light of the events of the previous two centuries. The War for Independence was not a homogeneously Christian endeavor, nor was it a purely Calvinistic one. Calvinists of various kinds joined with Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Arminians, Quakers, Jews, and even rationalists to bring about the triumph of the colonial cause.<sup>32</sup> However, the example of the influence of Calvinism on colonial Roman Catholics is instructive in at least two ways, in regard to the explicitly or implicitly secular theses of the two prevailing interpretations of the origins of the American Revolution. First, it illustrates something of the *diversity* of Christianity's influence on America. Second, and perhaps more important, it indicates the strength of the *impact of Calvinism* even on those predisposed to reject its teachings.<sup>33</sup>

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30. D. Elton Trueblood, *Foundations for Reconstruction* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1961), 45.

31. Kuehnelt-Leddihn, "Western Dilemma," 49.

32. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 118.

It is not the purpose of this essay to arrive at an empirical weighing of the relative influences of the various theologies present at the time, but only to attempt to estimate the impact of Christianity, both directly and indirectly, on those momentous events. The foregoing considerations make it not surprising that a number of commentators have seen the Revolution as a dominantly Christian, and particularly Calvinist, enterprise. Comments Boettner:

Our own historian Bancroft says: "The Revolution of 1776, so far as it was affected by religion, was a Presbyterian measure. It was the natural outgrowth of the principles which the Presbyterianism of the Old World planted in her sons, the English Puritans, the Scotch Covenanters, the French Huguenots, the Dutch Calvinists, and the Presbyterians of Ulster." So intense, universal and aggressive were the Presbyterians in their zeal for liberty that the war was spoken of in England as "The Presbyterian Rebellion." An ardent colonial supporter of King George III wrote home: "I fix all the blame for these extraordinary proceedings upon the Presbyterians. They have been the chief and principal instruments in all these flaming measures. They always do and ever will act against the government from that restless and turbulent anti-monarchical spirit which has always distinguished them everywhere." When the news of "these extraordinary proceedings" reached England, Prime Minister Horace Walpole said in Parliament, "Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson" (John Witherspoon, president of Princeton, signer of Declaration of Independence).

History is eloquent in declaring that American democracy was born of Christianity and that Christianity was Calvinism.... {17} J. R. Sizzo tells us: "When Cornwallis was driven back to ultimate retreat and surrender at Yorktown, all of the colonels of the Colonial Army but one were Presbyterian elders. More than one-half of all the soldiers and officers of the American Army during the revolution were Presbyterians."<sup>34</sup>

The secretary of the Continental Congress, Charles Thompson, was a Presbyterian minister whom John Adams called "the life of the cause

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33. On Calvinism the standard work is John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1954] 1967). Among many others available, see Kuehnelt-Leddihn, "Western Dilemma," and William Cullen Dennis, "Puritanism as the Basis for American Conservatism," *Modern Age* 18 (Fall 1974): 404–13.

of liberty.”<sup>35</sup> The ecclesiastical dominance of the colonies by the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, the great similarity of their (colonial) church polities, the doctrinally minded attitude, and their almost unanimous support of the cause of independence<sup>36</sup> explain why some commentators confused the two. Congregationalists furnished a large portion of the Revolutionary leadership in the New England area, while Presbyterians furnished a large proportion of the leadership in the middle and southern colonies. Presbyterians, the most widely distributed denomination, were even more vocal in preaching the principles of the Revolution, as a consequence of which, during the course of the war, the British destroyed more than fifty Presbyterian churches, and defaced many others.<sup>37</sup> By the time of the Revolution, the Baptists, who shared the fundamental doctrines of their Calvinistic neighbors and were a growing denomination, were exerting an aggressive influence for the Revolution in Virginia and North Carolina.<sup>38</sup> Though the majority of the Anglican clergy were Loyalists, the laity were of a different mind. Through control of the vestries, they maintained control over the parishes throughout the entire colonial period; this helps to account for the unanimity of leading churchmen in Virginia in supporting the War for Independence, and for the unction with which they overthrew the established Church. The large majority of those who enacted the Declaration of Rights and began the independence movement in Virginia were vestrymen.<sup>39</sup> Emilio Castelar, the Spanish statesman, orator, and scholar, though no friend of Calvinism, was elo-

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34. Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine*, 383–84. See also Tim J. Campbell, *Central Themes of American Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959). Campbell provides an excellent summary of the impact of Calvinism on the American tradition, together with much historical information which cannot be included in this paper.

35. McNeill, *History and Character of Calvinism*, 364.

36. William W. Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 105–14; quoted in Campbell, *Central Themes*, 55.

37. William W. Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), 9–10.

38. *Ibid.*, 35.

39. Moncure Daniel Conway, *Edmund Randolph*, 30, quoted in Campbell, *Central Themes*, 53.

quent in attributing the formation of the American republic to the influence of Calvin,<sup>40</sup> and Charles H. Metzger, S. J., in his *Catholics and the American Revolution*, {18} has emphasized its Protestant climate and the reasons for Roman Catholic adherence to the cause.<sup>41</sup> The fundamental unity of Protestant theology which led to the acceptance of such fundamental Calvinistic concepts as the Holy Commonwealth throughout the colonies was instrumental in creating these conditions (though perhaps this particular one was less strongly manifested in the South than New England). That this was so from the beginning is indicated by historian Perry Miller's remark: "I contend that the Virginia Settlement, no less than the New England, lends itself to little more than a bare chronicle unless the cosmological and religious premises are taken into account."<sup>42</sup>

In light of the above evidence, we are not surprised by the fact that it was Robert Newman, sexton of the Old North Church, who sent the famous signals from that church to the patriots waiting on the shore at Charleston across from Boston Harbor, an event immortalized though distorted by Longfellow's tale of Paul Revere. Nor are we surprised that it was in a meeting in St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia, in late March of 1775, that Patrick Henry delivered his famous "Give me Liberty or give me death" speech. The Declaration itself was a result of previous popular protests—"nonimportation agreements, committees of correspondence, councils of safety, minute men and militia, and declarations by assemblies in colonies, provinces, counties and communities."<sup>43</sup> The most famous of these declarations was the Mecklenburg Declaration of May 20, 1775, the first overt act of independence in the

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40. Boettner, 384.

41. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962); cited in Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 112.

42. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 100; quoted in Mark Tapscott, "Theology and Symbol in the American Political Tradition," unpublished paper, University of Dallas, 1973, 6. Miller, of course, was the preeminent historian of American Puritanism, although his modifications of the Puritans' biblical orientation, doctrinal formulations, emphasis on the person and work of Christ, and of their Calvinism contributed to distortions of such important doctrines as that of the covenant. See George M. Marsden, "Perry Miller's Rehabilitation of the Puritans: A Critique," *Church History* 39 (March 1970): 91–105.

colonies by a legally constituted body; though the date of its signing is debated, the Mecklenburg Resolves of eleven days later cover similar ground.<sup>44</sup> The abundance of such events before the war, plus a consideration of the much neglected but obvious manifestation of Christian intent in the state constitutions adopted or modified after the war,<sup>45</sup> raise certain questions which seem to place the burden {19} of proof on the debunkers and other secular metaphysicians. To what extent were the colonists really touched by rationalism? To what extent were their leaders rationalistic? Assuming that the leaders of the movement were rationalists, what enabled them to lead the people? And what of the Christian overtones and themes in their rhetoric? What, especially, enabled Washington, himself a Christian, and his officers, many of them Christians, to command the allegiance and loyalty of so large a number of people throughout the course of so long, difficult, and dangerous a struggle? Heimert's comment speaks to this point:

As has been observed, a "pure rationalism" might have declared the independence of the American people, "but it could never have inspired them to fight for it."<sup>46</sup>

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43. William Childs Robinson, "We the People," *Presbyterian Journal* 34 (March 17, 1976): 7.

44. See Billy Graham, "An Act of Independence," *Presbyterian Journal* 34 (December 3, 1975): 7. The text of the "Resolves," together with some other pertinent material, will be found in James H. Smylie, ed., *Presbyterians and the American Revolution: A Documentary Account* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1975).

45. The failure to include even the preambles of such constitutions in recent documentary readings is interesting and significant. Eidelberg, in his earlier work, *The Philosophy of the American Constitution: A Reinterpretation of the Intentions of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1968), has included an appendix on "Provisions in the State Constitutions Respecting Religion, Morality, Education and the Qualities Required of Statesmen," 264–71. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 90–120, has discussed this further. The state constitutions are to be found in *Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the United States*, 2 vols. (Washington, D C: Government Printing Office, 1877–1888).

46. Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 18. The quotation is from Perry Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," in *The Shaping of American Religion: Religion in American Life*, vol. 1, ed. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 343.

It is to the elucidation of this point that we now turn.

### *The Theoretical Background*

John Calvin was the virtual Founder of America.—Leopold von Ranke, German historian

It is therefore because of “the deep depravation” of man’s nature due to original sin most wholesome for magistrates and officers in church and commonwealth never to affect more liberty and authority than will do them good, and the people good: for whatever transcendent power is given will certainly overrun those that give it and those that receive it. There is a strain in a man’s heart that will sometime or other run out to excess, unless, the Lord restrain it; but it is not good to venture it.

It is necessary, therefore, that all power that is on earth be limited, church-power or other.—John Cotton (1584–1652), “Limitation of Government”

There is no better place to begin a survey of the theoretical roots of the Revolution than with an examination of the most fundamental convictions of the great majority of the people. Since even the Supreme Court has recognized that “we are a people whose institutions presuppose {20} a Supreme Being,”<sup>47</sup> it is not unreasonable to commence with some consideration of early America’s dominant theology. Yet we cannot fully agree with Wirt that “it was not so much what Calvin taught us as the kind of people he produced that made the American experience possible.”<sup>48</sup> For despite the failure of many to follow all of the great Reformer’s teachings, it was precisely Calvin’s *teachings* that produced the distinctive moral and intellectual tone of earlier American society.

Calvin’s chief contribution and central teaching was to remind men of the biblical teaching of the *sovereignty of God*, a tenet which was made the cornerstone of colonial statecraft and domestic life.<sup>49</sup> Because God, in addition to being righteous and loving, is omnipotent

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47. For more evidence on this subject, see Campbell, *Central Themes*, 134–40, 171–74, and passim; and Clarence Manion, *The Key to Peace* (Chicago: Heritage Foundation, 1951), 109–21 and passim.

48. Sherwood Eliot Wirt, “Calvin’s Influence in America,” *Christianity Today*, October 4, 1975, 4–6.

and omniscient, Calvin taught, God's inspired word, given to us in the Bible, is trustworthy, and it is man's only fully and ultimately authoritative standard of faith and practice in all areas of life. The political outlook deriving from this faith in "the Sovereignty of the Triune, God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible,"<sup>50</sup> was well described by Kuyper :

... the Calvinistic confession of the Sovereignty of God holds good for all the world, is true for all nations, and is of force in all authority which man exercises over man.... It is therefore a political faith which may be summarily expressed in these three theses: 1. God only—and never any creature—is possessed of sovereign rights, in the destiny of nations, because God alone created them, maintains them by His Almighty power, and rules them by His ordinances. 2. Sin has, in the realm of politics, broken down the direct government of God, and therefore the exercise of authority, for the purpose of government, has subsequently been invested in men, as a mechanical remedy. And 3. In whatever form this authority may reveal itself, man never possesses power over his fellow man in any other way than by the authority which descends upon him from the majesty of God.

Directly opposed to this ... confession there are two other theories. That of the Popular-sovereignty, as it has been anti-theistically proclaimed at Paris in 1789; and that of State-sovereignty....

Calvinism protests against State-omnipotence; against the horrible conception that no right exists above and beyond existing laws; and against {21} the pride of absolutism, which recognizes not constitutional rights, except as the result of princely favor.... Calvinism is to be praised for having built a dam across this absolutistic stream, not by appealing to popular force, nor to the hallucination of human greatness, but by deducing those rights and liberties of social life from the same source from which the high authority of government flows—even the absolute sovereignty of God.<sup>51</sup>

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49. Winfield Burgraff, *The Rise and Development of Liberal Theology in America*, quoted in John H. Bratt, "The History and Development of Calvinism in America," in Bratt, ed., *The Rise and Development of Calvinism: A Concise History* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., [1959] 1971), 122.

50. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc. [originally the Stone Lectures of 1898 at Princeton]), 48.

51. *Ibid.*, 52, 60.

Because God is sovereign over all things, His law, given to man in Scripture, is universally valid and binding on man, and on man's institutions. Thus, there can be no divinization of the community, as in the Greek *polis*, to justify total control of the life of the individual in the name of the common good. Nor is there the Platonic notion, poorly approximated in modern messianic ideologies, of justice as the subjection of all things to the will of that mythical being, the wise man. Man is not defined in terms of society or history, and so subordinated to either, but rather in terms of the *readily knowable word of his Creator*. In God's revelation to man in the form of the Bible, the individual has an infallible standard which tells him of both heavenly and earthly things: that he may be saved from the eternal consequences of his sins by God's grace, and that he may be saved—insofar as that is possible in this fallen and seemingly contingent world—from the consequences of others' sins by seeking to establish and maintain a government which conforms to the divine limits set forth in the divinely given moral law.<sup>52</sup> In that law man is given an incomparable moral standard distilled in the Decalogue, but visible also in both Old and New Testaments, in terms of which he can know the distinctions between good and evil, virtue and vice; and in terms of these divinely ordained standards, he can know the limits placed on men when they exercise political power as well as those placed on the actions (and thoughts) of individuals.

Because of original sin, the desire of man to be as God, determining for himself what is good and evil rather than following the perfect instruction of his righteous Creator, man is incapable of living in accordance with the perfect righteousness demanded by God, despite a knowledge of the works of the moral law written by the Creator on his heart and the inner promptings of his divinely given conscience. God in His mercy, however, has given man a more manifest standard in the revelation of law in His inscripturated word. This law acts both as a schoolmaster to teach men their utter inability to save themselves

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52. On the relevance and meaning of biblical law, see Trueblood, *Foundations for Reconstruction*; T. Robert Ingram, *The World Under God's Law* (Houston, TX: St. Thomas Press, [1962] 1970); and Rousas John Rushdoony's massive *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973).



through works, and thus to lead them in grace to a saving faith in Christ, and as a public standard of conduct. Thus, as Puritan divine John Winthrop, then lieutenant governor, {22} was to observe in his famous speech to the General Court of Massachusetts in 1645:<sup>53</sup>

There is a twofold liberty—natural (I mean as our nature is now corrupt), and civil or federal. The first is common to man, with beasts and other creatures. By this, man, as he stands in relation to man simply, hath liberty to do what he lists; it is a liberty to evil as well as to good. This liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority, and cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority. The exercise and maintaining of this liberty makes men grow more evil and in time to be worse than brute beasts....<sup>54</sup>

The other kind of liberty I call civil or federal; it may also be termed moral, in reference to the covenant between God and man in the moral law, and the politic covenants and constitutions amongst men themselves. This liberty is the proper end and object of authority and cannot subsist without it; and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for, with the hazard not only of your goods, but of your lives, if need be. Whatsoever crosseth this is not authority; it is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.<sup>55</sup>

This moral law applies to all men, to rulers as well as ruled. As Calvin had written in the final paragraph of book 4 of his great and influential work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, “We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord. If they command anything against him, let us not pay the least regard to it....”<sup>56</sup>

Since God is sovereign, Calvin taught, man can be sure of His word. And since that word teaches that salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus, man can be sure that if he has that per-

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53. Again, this is before the major political writings of Hobbes and long before those of Locke.

54. This, of course, is freedom in the modern Hobbesian sense. We have had ample evidence of the truth of Winthrop’s evaluation of its consequences—in both public and private life—in recent memory.

55. Quoted in Perry Miller, ed., *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Anchor Books, 1956), 92.

56. Quoted in Wirt, “Calvin’s Influence,” 6.

sonal faith in Jesus, God is powerful enough—and true to His promise—to ensure one's salvation. This is the much-abused and little-understood doctrine of election. Faith in the sovereign God of Scripture, though in some, particularly among the New England Puritans, it produced an introspective examination of one's life in order to discover whether one's faith was true faith, and thus one's eternal destiny, generally produced a repose and confidence in one's salvation which made men steadfast in the face of external threats. Such people had the inner strength to resist the religious persecution of Old World kingdoms and to face the rigors of life on the American frontier, as well as to oppose tyrants. Calvin's emphasis on one's obligation to obey {23} the law of God was reinforced by the gratitude of the believer in salvation by grace and divine election, with the result that Calvinists were marked by that which has confounded their uncomprehending critics ever since: a dedication to personal piety expressed through godly conduct.

This serious dedication to moral living, to living in obedience to the law of God, was applied by Calvin's followers to the social as well as to the personal sphere. Calvinists were concerned with godly conduct in the community, not merely by their fellow citizens, but by their rulers as well. Rulers, too, are under the law of God, Calvin had taught. Moreover, the great Reformer had taught, not only do subjects, despite their normal duty as private citizens to obey the ruler, have a higher duty, in terms of the sovereign law of God, to disregard the ruler's orders when he commands that which is against God, but subordinate officials

have not only the right but the duty to oppose and resist the intemperance of kings, according to the obligation of their office; and they may even be accused as guilty of perjury by reason of any deception whereby treacherously they betray the liberty of the people, of which they ought to recognize themselves as ordained trustees by the will of God.<sup>57</sup>

Though the people as such have no right to overthrow the rule of one whom they consider a tyrant, a degree of temperance—and, more important, conformity to the Bible—is inserted by obliging the people to follow the lead of the lesser magistrates who have been appointed to

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57. Calvin, *Institutes*, bk. 4, ch. 20, sec. 31; quoted in Albert Hyma, *Christianity and Politics* (Brant Publishing Co., 1960), 149.

curb the tyranny of kings, and who also are ordained by God. Calvin's teaching on *original sin*—that *all* have been so corrupted in both reason and will that it is impossible for man apart from the grace of God either fully to intend or fully to know the good—combined with his teaching of the *majesty of the law of God* to render rulers responsible, under God, to the ruled, and thus *to destroy the validity of absolutist theories of rule*. These themes, usually muted in Calvin by his desire to avoid stirring the people—as private citizens—excessively, were later expressed with great force and clarity in the famous Huguenot document *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579), which stressed the duty of all men to obey the law of God, though their rulers should command the contrary; the rebelliousness of any king who commanded something contrary to the law of God; and the duty of the people, led by the lesser magistrates, to oppose such a king in order to uphold the law.<sup>58</sup> Two years later this concept of government as a compact {24} imposing mutual obligations on ruler and ruled under God's law and entailing the right of the people, led by the lesser magistrates, to rebel against an unjust king in order to maintain the law, was clearly stated in the *Dutch Declaration of Independence*. The claim of the Dutch Declaration, that the king had violated his contract, the law of nature, and the traditional rights of the people and provinces, was clearly stated,<sup>59</sup> and, after influencing the English Puritans to demand a limitation on the king's power, reappeared in our own Declaration of Independence nearly two centuries later. The right of the people to rebel against tyrannical governments was recognized in *Federalist* no. 28. Clearly, both the message of the American Declaration and the presence of signatures of its authors in the Continental Congress—lesser magistrates under the king—at its end were not accidental occurrences.

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58. See A. Mervyn Davies, *Foundation of American Freedom* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), 94–95, 102–3; and Hyma, *Christianity and Politics*. Davies is very good background reading on the role of Calvinism in establishing representative government and political and intellectual freedom, though he uncritically accepts democracy both as the teaching of Calvin and as good.

59. It is surprising that so little has been done, in light of the significance of Dutch independence for Western freedom, on the great similarity between the two revolutions and declarations. See Hyma, *ibid.*, 151, 166–70, 225–29.

Though the parentage is not (and did not need to be) acknowledged therein, this *Calvinistic distrust of human nature*—including that of rulers, who were not thought to partake of a different order of being—is present in the Declaration and obvious in both the specific comments and the system of government set forth in *The Federalist*.<sup>60</sup> It was the latter document, the authors of which were confronted with the task of designing a popular government for the American people to live under and yet retain their traditional and natural or divine rights, in which the applicability of original sin to all was most clearly recognized and applied. Because all possess sin, civil order requires the following: separation of powers, checks and balances, connection of the self-interest of the man to the performance of his intended duties in each office, and federalism as it was originally intended to function (with reserved powers to the states and real limits on the power of government in the Constitution and in the machinery of government), together with the Bill of Rights and the Ninth and Tenth Amendments, to make sure that the traditional and natural or divine rights of the people and the reserved powers of the states remain obvious to all and, hopefully, intact.<sup>61</sup>

Contrary to the common misunderstanding of Calvin's teaching on original sin, however, the natural man—the man outside of God's saving {25} grace—is not incapable of doing anything good. Calvinists, whether in New England or Old, distinguished between the visible and the invisible Church, even where they tried hardest to reduce the distance between the two,<sup>62</sup> and, as the prevalence of spiritual autobiography and introspective verse in the literature of the American Puritans indicates, despite the familiar accusations leveled against the doctrine of election, they were painfully aware of their individual sins. Con-

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60. As *Federalist* no. 51 tells us, government is the greatest of all reflections of human nature; so the entire *Federalist* and the entire structure of government intended by the Founders is a treatise on human nature. Among many passages, see these in *The Federalist*, Modern Library College ed.), no. 6:27–28, 30; no. 9:48; no. 10: passim, but especially 55–56, 59–60; no. 17:102–3; no. 27:167–69; no. 28:174; no. 36:217; no. 37:232; no. 49:237; no. 51:336–40; no. 62:403–7; no. 63:407–410, 413; no. 68:444; no. 71:463–66.

61. More attention needs to be devoted to this topic, especially in light of the tendency of many to modernize or Hobbesianize *The Federalist* and so the founding.

sciousness of the reality of original sin, however, through the doctrine of the covenant,<sup>63</sup> made the individual's concern with virtue not merely personal but social.

The immense influence of the *doctrine of the covenant* on American history arises from its biblical basis and the dominance of Calvinistic theology in early America. Though most evident in the Old Testament, the covenant is also visible in the New Testament. It is essentially an agreement between God and a chosen group of men, initiated by God, and containing (in addition to two contracting parties): 1) a *promise*, the reward from God to man for obedience to His will (in the original covenant, the reward being salvation, or life in the highest sense: in eternal communion with God); 2) a *condition*, obedience to the will of God or faith in Him; 3) a *penalty* for violation of the terms of the compact. In all covenants involving the eternal destiny of man, the penalty is death: eternal separation from God. (In the original covenant between God and Adam, the penalty involved physical death also.) The three most significant elements of the covenant or federal (from *foedus*, covenant) theology are: the *covenant of grace*, provided by God for all the redeemed in Christ; the *church covenant*, whereby the saved are institutionally organized for communal worship, spiritual growth, and evangelical activity; and the *covenant of civil government*, wherein the civil authority, neither subordinate nor superordinate to the Church but rather, like all human institutions, subordinate to the Word of God, protects and upholds the Church, promotes the good of the commonwealth, maintains order, and administers justice.<sup>64</sup> Derived from Calvin, Bullinger, and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), covenant theology was developed in greater detail by a succession of theologians in the Rhineland and the Netherlands, and transmitted to the American

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62. See Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630–1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959). For a different emphasis, see Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963). Despite their desire for a pure church, however, the New England Puritans recognized the tremendous difficulty involved in discerning the truly saved.

63. Cushing Strout, *The New Heavens and a New Earth: Political Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 60–61.

64. Tapscott, "Theology and Symbol," 4, 12–13; and Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), 70–88.

colonists, particularly those of New England, by the great Puritan divines at Cambridge: William Perkins (1558–1602) and William {26} Ames (1576–1633). In America, the covenantal teaching is evident in the Westminster Confession, “by far the most influential doctrinal symbol in American Protestant history.”<sup>65</sup> Miller saw covenant theology as part of a universal tendency in European thought to change social relationships from status to contract, as a product of late Renaissance speculation, and as based on a view of original sin as external rather than internal. On the contrary, however, covenant theology was based precisely on *biblical* grounds, and on a view which acknowledged both the majesty of God’s law and the Augustinian tradition of the deadly nature of original sin, and which was based on the sovereignty, and yet personal concern, of God.<sup>66</sup>

Our main concern here is with the impact of these covenantal doctrines as a whole. The covenant of grace and the church covenant reinforced the concern of Christians for living according to God’s laws, and so produced a desire to be morally virtuous. The covenant of civil government, particularly in New England, made public this concern for virtuous living. Civil government was seen as a compact between individuals, in the presence of God and under His laws, in which it is the duty of the government to enact and enforce laws conforming to the higher standard given to man in revelation. Thus, the government should enact various “blue” laws in order to maintain a modicum of moral conduct, even among the unchurched. The connection of the covenant of grace and the church covenant with the historical circumstances occasioning the settling of the colonies, especially those of New England, reinforced the identification of the successful establishment of the settlements with God’s providential blessing for loyalty to His Word. Every new colony was thus seen as a *holy commonwealth*, a Christian society, in which men established their own Christian government—within the framework of the empire—under God, and on the basis of a faith in God and in obedience to a covenant with Him.<sup>67</sup>

65. Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 176–77.

66. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Beacon, [1939] 1968), 398–401; see also pp. 398–431. Miller’s quote on 401 undermines his thesis. See also Ahlstrom, *ibid.*, 176–81.

It was man's duty of obedience to the covenant which both prompted a concern for maintaining public virtue and led the more orthodox to see destructive events or declining morality as signs of God's displeasure or visitations of His wrath.<sup>68</sup> Personal piety and behavior, then, were of importance to the community as well as to the individual, a {27} concept manifest in the state constitutions and laws of the post-Revolutionary period, thereby belying the contention of Diamond and others that the regime established by the Founders made no provision for the encouragement of virtue or human excellence.<sup>69</sup>

Kendall and Carey, analyzing the American political tradition from its beginnings in our first political document, the Mayflower Compact, see the idea of the "virtuous people," a Christian people, as the central symbol of our tradition. This symbol, connoting a Christian people capable of self-government through primarily localized representative assemblies,<sup>70</sup> is present, by implication, in the Declaration as well as in the Constitution. Moreover, this symbol arises precisely from the Christian doctrine of the covenant, and is ultimately derivative from the sovereignty of God.

Were the doctrine of total depravity—the Calvinistic doctrine of original sin—abandoned, the covenant theology and its concept of Christian liberty could be paralleled by the secular doctrine of the social contract,<sup>71</sup> as is seen in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Although there were, by 1700, forces at work in the colonies which would eventually undermine the doctrine of original sin, Baldwin's comment on the

67. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 95–96.

68. The classic work on this is Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1953] 1966). Miller sees the federal theology as necessarily declining due to the impact of the embracing of the cause of science and rationality by such conservatives as the Mathers (459–61). Yet the federal theology was divorced only from a *rationalistic* approach to science and the use of man's reason.

69. Diamond, "Democracy and the *Federalist*." For the contrary position in relation to the central government, see Eidelberg's works. See also Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, chs. 2, 5, 8, 13; and *The Nature of the American System* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1965), ch. 3 and pp. 158–70.

70. Willmoore Kendall and George Carey, *The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970).

71. Singer, *Theological Interpretation*, 22–23.

influential and broadly representative view of the New England clergy is noteworthy:

Whatever form it might take, the clergy almost unanimously agreed that if it were a just government it had been founded on compact. This compact relationship was a matter of vital importance to the New England minister. *His theology depended upon it*, it was the foundation of his church government, *he believed it to be the root of all God's dealings with men*. When he searched the Bible he found, so he believed, that even the Jewish government, which was peculiarly God's own, rested on compact. When he questioned *Reason and Nature*, which to him were the *voice of God*, again he found the compact or covenant. When he read the wise men of the past and of his own day, once more he found it. When he looked at his own environment, he found it there. The charters were considered compacts, and when men set up new towns, they drew up a town covenant.<sup>72</sup> {28}

Although an increased religious diversity combined with secularizing forces and the impact of the Great Awakening to shift the idea of the holy commonwealth from an attempt to preserve the integrity of the church to an attempt to preserve the integrity of the civil government, that which was to be preserved was the *integrity of trinitarian Christianity*, usually associated with a rather pluralistic system of church establishments. Thus, the holy commonwealth idea, derived from and still dependent upon the covenant, then sought to preserve the integrity of Christianity rather than that of a particular church.<sup>73</sup>

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72. Alice Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1928), 24. See also pp. xii, 6–26, and passim. As will be subsequently shown, for well over a century before the Revolution, New England ministers, in election and other sermons, had taught the biblical basis of government by compact, limitation of governmental power, the right of rebellion upon violation of the compact, and the rights of Englishmen. Miller, in “From the Covenant to the Revival,” 322–43 and passim, underscored both the geographical comprehensiveness and the psychological importance of the traditional covenant theology in the success of the Revolution. The success of the “day of publick humiliation, fasting and prayer” recommended by the Continental Congress in June of 1775 is attributable precisely to its conformity to the covenantal theology in the traditional jeremiads, *not* to any rationalistic appeals *a la Common Sense*. Miller’s analysis exposes the shallowness of the view which sees the religious appeal as a calculated and conspiratorial propaganda maneuver.

73. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 90–120.



The Puritan was not yet Yankee; the American, as Tocqueville was to note in 1833, was not yet “enlightened.”

### *The Concept of a Higher Law*

Although Calvinism was the principal theological and ecclesiastical influence on America’s formative years, Calvinism itself was built upon a biblical heritage deriving from a thousand years of Christian dominance in the West, but directly traceable to God’s revelation to His chosen people, Israel, and to the events foretold and recounted in His written revelation. This propositional revelation was given institutional form in Western civilization during the thousand years of the medieval period. Far from being the period of darkness and ignorance of the dominant secular historiography, the medieval period represented a distinct improvement over previous, pagan, views of God, man, and government. The teachings of the Bible about God as Creator and Sovereign of the universe led men away from the pagan view of nature as something to be feared and magically propitiated via the intermediary offices of a divinized ruler or *polis* in possession of the esoteric knowledge required to placate the warring gods previously believed to rule the forces of nature. Divine revelation therefore had the effect of de-divinizing the state and placing the king (or rulers) under a knowable, publicly accessible *higher law*. The biblical doctrine of the covenant implied not only a higher law to which all men are obligated, but also that the people are able to keep that law, and liable to punishment should they violate it. The impact of the belief in the validity of the covenant during the medieval period so shaped the institutional forms of the West that the idea of higher law became the characteristic of medieval {29} politics.<sup>74</sup>

The medieval period also combined Christianity with the classical tradition of *natural right*, giving it a Christian tone which emphasized universal legal norms, produced by God’s will and especially knowable

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74. M. Stanton Evans, “The American Revolution: A Study in Conservatism,” an address delivered before *The South and the Nature of the Republic: A Bicentennial Seminar* (Hotel Adolphus, Dallas, TX, March 27, 1976). On the de-divinization of the state, see Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1971), 202–26.

via the study of His word, rather than the abstract universals knowable by the autonomous rationality of classical thought. Natural law had always presupposed a God who had designed its norms into the constitution of being, but it was the sovereign God of Holy Scripture, not the limited and unknown gods of the Greeks, who made these moral laws not only available but also fully credible. The medieval and Reformation teaching on *natural law* combined with the medieval, scripturally derived, teaching of *property rights* with which the king would not interfere, to form an essential basis of the Renaissance and Enlightenment theory of *natural rights*. In America, natural law teaching was largely expressed in the form of natural rights, and derived primarily from the writings of the English Civil War (the writings of the Puritans, Milton, and Sidney) and of the Glorious Revolution (the writings of the Puritan-influenced Locke),<sup>75</sup> though generally not detached from its theological roots.

In the nation from whence our dominant tradition sprang, biblical law and the largely Christian natural law combined to form the theological or philosophical framework of justice upon which judges drew in order to blend custom with universal principle in the formation of the cherished common law. Thus, in the *common law* biblical morality joined with ancient ways to form a complex body of legal precedents, continually refined in the crucible of experience, upon which future judges are to base their decisions. Sanctioned by popular assent to its fairness, the common law was the basis of order in England and America. Because of its biblical law framework, as well as its traditional and popular nature, its contents made it the basis of liberty, both in its *general limitation upon rulers* by established, humanly approximated, higher law and by its *specific guarantees to the individual*, regardless of his station. Introduced into every colonial charter, its violation by king and Parliament was a central cause of the American Revolution.<sup>76</sup> Intended to be included in the Constitution by the framers, its seeming absence from that document was of such concern to the American

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75. Benjamin F. Wright Jr., *American Interpretations of Natural Law: A Study in the History of Political Thought* (New York: Russell and Russell, [1931] 1962), 3–6.

76. Kirk, *Roots of American Order*, 183–92.

people that it was included, both explicitly and implicitly, in our fundamental law, in the form of the Bill of Rights.<sup>77</sup>

The effect of this divinely given higher law on medieval politics, whether {30} in the form of common law or natural law, as it meshed with the unfolding of history, was threefold. First, the king was limited from above by the higher law. Second, the king was limited laterally by the Church. Finally, the king was limited from below by feudalism. The *feudal order* limited the central power of the king in theory because the lower orders of the nobility were able to draw upon the higher law revealed in Holy Scripture in order to discern if the ruler's conduct be just. In practice, the feudal order limited the king because it represented a *wide diffusion of power* and, in England, had its rights concretely embodied in the *Magna Charta*, which extended the basic prohibition of arbitrary action by a lord to all the freemen of England, thus strengthening the rule of law and the basis for opposition to absolutism.<sup>78</sup> Representative government grew, to a large extent, out of the desire of subordinate persons—instructed by the divine law and view of creation given in revelation—to limit the power of the king, together with the king's necessity of calling on his subjects for revenue. The feudal order also limited the king because it was a *vast network of personal contracts*. These contracts between king and vassals, as between men of various stations throughout society, recognized mutual obligations and rights, because they were based on an essential sameness of human beings, a concept present in the American Declaration. The ultimate limitation placed on the king under the dispensation of the feudal covenant was the right of subjects, led by lesser officials, to rebel if the ruler should excessively violate the fundamental law, an idea first seen in a pamphlet attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>79</sup>

These ideas were not ordered in a systematic structure during the medieval period, but were systematized as a consequence of the Reformation, when large and articulate groups of the population in various

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77. *Ibid.*; see also Robert Allen Rutland, *The Birth of the Bill of Rights, 1776–1791* (New York: Collier Books, [1955] 1962).

78. Evans, “American Revolution”; Sidney Painter, *Feudalism and Liberty* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961), 13–14, 247–53.

79. Evans, *ibid.*

European countries sought justification for resisting the tyrannical designs of a king of a different (Protestant or Catholic) denomination. In France, this system of ideas was expressed by the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579). In England, it was repeated by Anglican Richard Hooker, by certain Jesuits, and later by the Puritans. The covenantal idea of an unchangeable law limiting the king was propounded in 1613 by Sir Edwin Sandys, who declared the king and people to be in covenantal relationship. The parliamentary expression of this, by Puritans, produced the Petition of Right in 1628.<sup>80</sup>

The significance of these events is at least twofold. First, it was during this period that our forefathers emigrated to America. In 1619 the Virginia House of Burgesses was established; in 1620 the Mayflower Compact, {31} itself a covenant, was established. In 1629 the Massachusetts Bay Company established its famous settlement, an event which is significant because the company could, under the authority granted it by its royal charter, have ruled the colony with an iron hand—yet it allowed all church members to vote. Moreover, the Massachusetts General Court of 1635, true to its feudal heritage, stressed localism. Secondly, the above events grew out of the theologically founded covenantal understanding of society, deeply intertwined with experience, well before Hobbes and later Locke attempted to supplant the covenant with the secularized “social contract.” The understanding of society embodied in the Declaration of 1776 was, however, as we shall see, a later manifestation of the heritage of medieval and Reformation England, not a modern document.<sup>81</sup> It was predominantly upon this older heritage that colonial Americans’ understanding of man and society, especially their society, was founded.

At this point, a word on Classical Liberalism and John Locke becomes necessary. As Hallowell<sup>82</sup> has pointed out, Classical or integral Liberalism was based on a fundamentally incompatible combina-

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80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.* See also, with special reference to the Puritans, A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647–1649), From the Clarke Manuscripts, with Supplementary Documents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), passim, but especially 12–14 and 187–90.

82. Hallowell, *Main Currents*, 84–158.

tion of Renaissance and Reformation ideas. From Christianity and the Reformation, it took the idea of the absolute moral worth of the human personality, the idea of a higher, rationally knowable, divinely given law, the idea of society as a compact, under God, based on the higher law, and the culturally prevalent Christian morality. From the Renaissance, Classical Liberalism took the ideas of the autonomy of man's mind and the newly revived ancient dictum of Protagoras (and Adam), that "Man is the measure of all things," and combined it with the outlook of the new science, viewing society as composed of atomistic individuals living together under laws not discovered but made, and obeyed not because of their inherent justice, but because of the force behind them. As self-proclaimed autonomous men turned increasingly from a theistic concept of God to a deistic one, it became possible to attribute even greater freedom of will and power to man. And the knowledge of nature gained via the new science tempted many to believe that by an extension of its empirical methods, plus the use of his own reason, man might find God unnecessary, except, perhaps, as a logically necessary premise or as a metaphysical abstraction. Ultimately, the corrosive acids of post-Renaissance thought sundered the ancient but fragile cultural bonds between Christian moral teachings and modern assumptions. In accordance with the presupposition of man's autonomy, {32} Christianity was first reduced (by Locke and others) to a "rational" (read: rationalistic) religion, and then attacked as irrational. By the twentieth century, utilitarianism's unknowable hedonistic principle of the "greatest good for the greatest number," pragmatism's and historicism's revolutionary emphasis on endless change as fundamental, reinforced by pre- and post-Darwinian evolutionary speculation, and positivism's nihilistic facts-values dualism<sup>83</sup> had removed almost all traces of Christian morality and assumptions from a now thoroughly relativistic and largely collectivistic twentieth-century Liberalism. But this process was not effective in America until well after the Revolution.<sup>84</sup>

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83. To say nothing of the irrationality of Marxism, nor of other components of the ideology which could be mentioned. See Hallowell, *ibid.*, 189–234, 289–327; and Singer, *Theological Interpretation*, 92–262. On pragmatism, see also Gordon H. Clark's monographs, *William James* and *Dewey* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963 and 1960, respectively).

Scholars have made much of John Locke's role as a secularizer of political thought (with some justification), and have seized upon the presence of Lockean phrases in the rhetoric of prerevolutionary and revolutionary periods to make of the War for Independence a secular enterprise. It is well to remember, however, as has been pointed out above, that *Locke was used selectively* by the colonists, and that he was preceded by a long line of more explicitly theological political thinkers who originated and developed the themes of society as contractual, of individual rights and of the right of the people to revolt against an unjust ruler. More than forty years before the publication of the *Two Treatises*, Samuel Rutherford had published *Lex Rex (The Law and the King)*, in 1644), in which he stressed respect for the law, respect for the people, freedom of the church from the state, recognition of the limits placed on human institutions, the duty of kings to rule under God, bound in covenant with Him and with the people, and the right of the people, based on their consciences, to resist authorities who break the covenant.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, Locke himself was the direct heir of Puritan political thinkers, as well as the son of a Puritan, who not only claimed that he derived his political teachings from the Bible, but whose political teachings "had become the common stock-in-trade of the Independents as a whole."<sup>86</sup> Hudson's comment is telling:

Where did Locke derive his political ideas? With regard to his general {33} political principles one need not look far. They were being shouted from the housetops during the years he was at Westminster and Oxford, and they had been explicated again and again by the sons of Geneva with whom he was in contact throughout his life.<sup>87</sup>

The seemingly strange alliance of pietists and rationalists in the American Revolution, which has puzzled many scholars, is to be explained in terms of an agreement on the same practical goal, but also

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84. Bratt, "History and Development," 124–25.

85. George L. Hunt, "Our Calvinist Heritage in Church and State," in Hunt, ed., *Calvinism and the Political Order* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 180–81. See also Campbell, *Central Themes*, 102.

86. Winthrop S. Hudson, "John Locke: Heir of Puritan Political Theorists," in Hunt, 111.

87. *Ibid.*, 113.

in terms of the operation of the rationalists within the context of the pietists' categories:

They had accepted the pietists' presuppositions, and they had adopted the pietists' arguments. Nor were the rationalists "secular" in their point of view. They still thought in terms of the claim of God in the natural order as it was made known to them by the light of nature.<sup>88</sup>

Locke has been misunderstood by much later rationalistic scholars, who overlook his desire to avoid being accused of sedition (hence his frequent citation of Hooker rather than his Puritan forebears) and his terminology, which was such as to be susceptible to a secular interpretation by later men. But for Locke, God was not absent from the civil order; rather, it was under His rule and was to be ordered according to His will. Puritan tracts and sermons before and during the time of Locke, generally ignored by scholars as belonging to another genre, characteristically appeal to natural law.<sup>89</sup> Locke was

made to order for those who sought to defend the rights of the American colonists in the years preceding the American Revolution. On the one hand, his political thought was thoroughly acceptable in America because it was a restatement of familiar principles—principles forged by the heirs of John Calvin during the English Civil Wars and long the common property of most of colonial America. On the other hand, as the chief apologist of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 which brought William and Mary to the English and Scottish thrones, Locke was eminently respectable.<sup>90</sup>

James Otis noted the great utility of being able to quote Locke rather than the earlier Puritan political theorists: to have cited the Puritan writers would have given opponents of the colonial cause excuse to raise the cry of rebellion. Few British or American contemporaries were misled as to the source of Locke's ideas.<sup>91</sup>

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88. *Ibid.*, 128–29.

89. *Ibid.*, 109–11; see also Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 86–95, 187–91, 325–37, and *passim*.

90. *Ibid.*, 108.

91. *Ibid.*

### *The Historical Background*

The evidence shows that neither the clergy, including Wise, nor the laymen as a whole turned so completely from theology and the Scripture {34} in their political thinking as Adams implies. There was no conflict in their minds between the divine and natural law. They were the same....

God and Christ govern always by fixed rules, by a divine constitution, and therefore so must human rulers. The fundamental constitutions of states may differ; men's rights under them may be greater or less, but certain great rights are given by Nature and Nature's God to the people. These are a part of every constitution and no ruler is permitted by God to violate them. Rulers cannot change the constitution; that can be done only by the people. But the constitution and the laws must be consonant with the divine law. Therefore rulers must study carefully the laws of God, both natural and revealed. In the Bible are founded the maxims and rules of government: there the natural laws are made clearer, there the ruler learns his due authority and its limitations, there the people learn how far they must submit.—Alice Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*<sup>92</sup>

Among the myriad events preceding the American Revolution, three stand out. Their prominence is due to the fact that they are both anticipatory and preparatory. And their importance may be gauged by the fact that they are both increased in weight by and increase the weight and impact of prior and subsequent events in the long chain of causes leading to the Revolution. As preparatory events, they are given significance not only by their content, but also by the duration of their influence. Indeed, it is possible to doubt that without these three events—the *political teachings of the New England clergy*, the *Great Awakening*, and the *Episcopal Controversy*—the movement for independence would have occurred. The details of these events cannot be presented here, but a summary of a much larger body of evidence is essential to an appreciation of the larger causal dimensions of the Revolution.

Not only immediately before and after 1763, but for more than one hundred years before the Revolution, the *New England clergy* had taught their congregations a political philosophy founded upon Christian grounds and derived from the law of God as given to man in nature and as mercifully clarified for man in Holy Scripture. The doc-

92. *Ibid.*, 29–30, 35.



trines of this political philosophy were the result of long study of the Bible, traditional belief dating from the seventh century and earlier, and grew out of theology, church polity, and ecclesiastical controversy, as well as out of more purely political thought.<sup>93</sup> In a time and place when religion<sup>94</sup> and the clergy were far more influential than they are today, New England ministers, who {35} were close to their congregations, college educated, and on the whole respected and influential, preserved, extended, popularized, and carefully analyzed the essential doctrines of this political philosophy throughout both the pre-war generations and the long struggle itself. In a day when the press was less influential than the clergy, New Englanders repeatedly received these doctrines from their ministers in the form of doctrinal and political sermons, decisions of church councils, and the ubiquitous, frequently reprinted, and widely circulated election-day sermons. These means of instruction were reinforced by the abundant pamphlet literature occasioned by the frequent religious and ecclesiastical controversies of the eighteenth century. Through these means, the origin and ends of civil government were examined, together with their own charters and the dearly won rights of Englishmen, the qualities and responsibilities of magistrates, and the rights and duties of the people.<sup>95</sup> Throughout this long period, the intimate connection of the New England ideas of government with theology and their interpretation of the Bible was evident. Although Locke and Sidney were frequently cited, along with Luther, Calvin, the writers of the classical and late Roman days, and a wide variety of sacred and secular writers,

It must not be forgotten, in the multiplicity of authors mentioned, that the source of greatest authority and the one most commonly used was the Bible. The New England preacher drew his beliefs largely from the Bible, which was to him a sacred book, infallible, God's will for man. Of necessity, it colored his political thinking. His conception of God, of God's law, and of God's relation to man determined to a large extent

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93. *Ibid.*, xii, 5–6, 168, 172.

94. Religion in the conventional sense. In the most fundamental sense, man is a religious being because he acts on the basis of presupposed answers to the enduring questions about the nature of reality and man's purpose.

95. Baldwin, *New England Clergy*, xii, 3–8, 168–70. See also Claude H. Van Tyne, *The Causes of the War of Independence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 23.

his conception of human law and of man's relation to his fellows. If his ideas of government and the rights of man were in part derived from other sources, they were strengthened and sanctioned by Holy Writ.<sup>96</sup>

What were the teachings of this New England theo-political philosophy? Its starting premise was the Puritan concept of *God as sovereign* of the universe, who made man a rational creature, put "Law into the very Frame and Constitution of his Soul," and deals with men on the basis of conditional and obligatory compacts or covenants. This sovereign God is the Lawgiver, who has established perfectly wise, just, and good laws, founded upon the nature and relation of things, which are of universal obligation. This *fixed and fundamental law* is threefold, including the law of nature, the law of the Old Testament, and the law of Christ. The law of nature is not distinct from the law of God. Rather, it is as legally binding as any other part of the divine law, and gains greater force as a part of God's law, {36} especially since it is clarified by the binding portion of Old and New Testament law. Since God's government is founded and limited by law, all human governments must be so founded and limited. Whether the argument was founded on reason or the law of nature or the Bible, in the end it amounted to the same thing, for the law of nature was seen as God's law. Civil government was thus of divine origin, for the good of the people, due to the effects of original sin. *Civil government exists to enforce the fundamental law*; it must have the good of the people at heart, or it loses God's sanction, for rulers are limited by the fundamental constitution of God's law. The peculiar, providentially granted *privileges of Englishmen* are also guaranteed by the constitution. A just government is founded on a compact between ruler(s) and people, and under divine law. *Any act contrary to the constitution is illegal, and so null and void*. No one is bound to obey an unconstitutional act, so there is a right to resist encroachments of one's rights to life, liberty, and the fruits of one's labor, plus all the rights of the *Magna Charta*, and, perhaps most cherished of all to New Englanders, a certain amount of religious freedom. These, together with their privileges under the charters, chief among them the right to choose their own councilors, were sanctioned by the fundamental law of their colonies and by religious principle, and must be upheld. No

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96. *Ibid.*, 12.

single principle was more emphasized and repeated during the first six decades of the eighteenth century than the old principle of the *Vindiciae*: he who resists one in authority who violated fundamental law is not a rebel but a protector of law.<sup>97</sup>

As John Adams was later to say, “honor and obedience to good rulers, and a spirited opposition to bad ones” was the burden of New England preaching.<sup>98</sup> Although these principles were popularized long before the War for Independence, they were not abandoned in the interim, despite periodic declines in the orthodoxy of many of the clergy, for clergy and laymen kept their flame alive throughout the eighteenth century. As late as 1760, Pownall, the governor of Massachusetts, had warned that once the ministers fell in with the spirit of resistance by force to all efforts to tax the people without their consent, or if the people were to call on the ministers, “the spirit of their religion ... will, like Moses’ serpent, devour every other passion and affection.”<sup>99</sup> Events such as the French and Indian War in the 1750s, the Stamp Act Controversy in the early 1760s, and the Quebec Act in the 1770s did much to revive the flames of the traditional political and religious concerns, but perhaps no event contributed so {37} much to renew the spirit of the traditional religion as the Great Awakening.

The two decades following the *Great Awakening*, 1743–1763, were prolific in sermons, pamphlets, and petitions in which the constitutional rights of the colonists, civil and religious liberty, the right of resistance, and other familiar themes were more clearly defined and positively asserted than ever before.<sup>100</sup> That this was a result of the Awakening is suggested by the fact that the great event of the 1740s contributed greatly to the development of a sense of cohesiveness or nationalism, reinforcing the conviction that God had a special destiny for America,<sup>101</sup> but even more so by the fact that the Awakening represented a revival of the old Calvinistic teaching of original sin or human

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97. *Ibid.*, 13–23, 27, 29, 82–84, 168–69, passim; and Van Tyne, *Causes of the War*, 23, 355–57. See also Edmund S. Morgan, “The Revolution as an Intellectual Movement,” in Esmond Wright, *Causes and Consequences*, 175–76.

98. Quoted in Van Tyne, *ibid.*, 358.

99. *Ibid.*, 361.

100. Baldwin, *New England Clergy*, 65.

depravity. The Great Awakening represented an intellectual watershed in American history, wherein the two main strains of Puritanism, *reason* and *piety*, previously in precarious balance, were each launched on the way to *independent fulfillment*, although it would be many decades before they were sufficiently removed from the powerful influence of the traditional theology to reach the separation between “faith” and “reason” manifested in Europe in 1789. The fundamental post-Awakening division in American society was theological and intellectual more than economic or social: America was henceforth divided between *rationalists* and *evangelicals*. Rationalists manifested an “Enlightenment” confidence in human nature and man’s reason; evangelicals manifested a Calvinistic conviction of human depravity, combined with an equally Calvinistic confidence in the power of God’s grace to transform men’s lives and, only through this means, society.<sup>102</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to see the effect of the Great Awakening as merely sharpening the cleavage between Calvinists and rationalists, for its effect was *both revitalizing* to Christian faith *and culturally destructive* to the partial fusion of Calvinism with New England culture. While the Awakening’s onslaught upon incipient liberalism brought many back (or for the first time) to their Bibles and markedly decreased the insularity of the New England Way, these gains were at the price of undermining the social and political base of the old Calvinists. The emotional excesses of the revivals accompanying the Awakening brought opposition from the orthodox old Calvinists, but also encouraged rationalistic liberals to make, in the course of criticizing revivalistic emotionalism, more open statements of their own non-scriptural position. While the orthodox party spent most of its energy combating the liberals, both the opposition of the old {38} Calvinists to the emotionalism of the Awakening and the strong element of conventionalism in their accommodation with New England cultural mores tarnished their image in the eyes of the New Divinity men and their followers in the party of the Awakening. The attempt of the party of the

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101. Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (Scribners, 1965), 76; quoted in Mark R. Shaw, “The Spirit of 1740,” *Christianity Today*, January 2, 1976, 8. See also Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, viii and passim.

102. Heimert, *ibid.*, 3–8, 10; Morgan, “Revolution,” 184–86.

Awakening to make an emotional conversion experience, rather than recognizing also the possibility of gradual growth in grace, the criterion for determining both assurance of salvation and church membership not only split churches, but also damaged the concord of town and congregation achieved by the old Calvinists. The party of the Awakening's stress on personal piety, together with its neglect of the function of the church in nurturing souls and its denigration of learning, combined with its implicitly Arminian stress on the availability of God's love to all who will accept, via the emotional conversion experience of the revival, the offer of His grace (the emphasis being on God's love rather than upon His justice)—to acquire conversion—to further weaken the old Calvinists' emphasis on biblical law and the social covenant, or holy commonwealth idea. The function of the church was seen by the revivalists as providing a base for developing personal piety and from which souls could be won via the interior ecstasy of conversion, rather than as also providing an integral institution which also provided a basis for establishing and maintaining a Christian social order. To be sure, the postmillennial eschatology of the Great Awakening provided for a Christianized social order, but that order was to be established through massive conversions and interior personal piety rather than also through the seemingly more mundane labors of Christian statesmen, scholars, and teachers. It was the Second Great Awakening (*ca.* 1799–1815) before the New Divinity clergy and congregations turned to a kind of moralism similar to that from which they had originally sundered themselves: first, “to save New England from ‘jacobinism,’” and then, turning outwards, to reconstruct society along moral lines, via exporting the New England Way to the West, the foreign missions movement, and finally (paradoxically, against the Calvinists of the South), abolitionism.<sup>103</sup>

Ideas, as Richard Weaver has written, have consequences. But the consequences of ideas frequently take time to manifest themselves.

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103. Richard D. Birdsall, “Ezra Stiles versus the New Divinity Men,” *American Quarterly* 17:248–56; Donald Meyer, “The Dissolution of Calvinism,” in Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and Morton White, eds., *Paths of American Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), 71–82; and Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 103–40, but especially 127–40. See also Miller, “From the Covenant to the Revival,” 362 and *passim*.

Although the First Great Awakening had effectively established the dominance in New England and much of the colonies of an emotional Arminianism which neglected certain crucial doctrines of the old Calvinism, the influence of Calvinism was not dead. Not only did the old Calvinists remain, though {39} weakened, in New England and elsewhere, but enough of the traditional Calvinist doctrines remained dominant to confuse subsequent scholars as to the theological import of the Awakening.<sup>104</sup> More important, enough of the Calvinist tradition remained present that

Americans retained what the Enlightenment had dimmed in England and Europe, a keen sense of human depravity and of the dangers it posed for government. Although their own governments had hitherto given little evidence of depravity, by comparison with those of Europe, they were expert at detecting it in any degree.<sup>105</sup>

It was this knowledge of human depravity, plus the traditional Calvinist emphasis on the majesty of the divine law, which made the colonists so disposed to detect violations of principle. However, though the Awakening produced a national resurgence of a radically modified version of the old Calvinism, it was the “liberals” of the day, the rationalists, who, contrary to the popular theme of many subsequent historians, were most likely to cleave to the old imperial order. The *liberals*, or more accurately, Arminian rationalists, basing their trust for salvation in the development of human reason, were profoundly elitist and “conservative,” seeing themselves as the rational “elect,” and the evangelicals as a passionate rabble. They were disposed to interpret the social contract as a means of holding in check their inferiors; were, almost to a man in the 1770s, if not outright Tories, seekers of some compromise solution to the controversy between Great Britain and the colonies, who preached Locke almost as a justification of the *status quo*.<sup>106</sup>

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104. I have in mind principally Heimert, whose work on these matters is otherwise outstanding, and Gaustad, whose work is also notable. William G. McLoughlin, “Pietism and the American Character,” *American Quarterly* 17:165–66, has recognized a split among the nonrationalistic Christians.

105. Morgan, “Revolution,” 186.

106. Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 12, 16–17, 47–48, and *passim*.

Not only did the old Calvinists generally favor independence, but it was the evangelical<sup>107</sup> clergymen of America who, as a consequence of the Awakening, reasoned from their belief in salvation by grace and a conversion experience to a “democratic”—but not anti-intellectual or egalitarian or even fully majoritarian—outlook which opposed the tendency of some men to “lord it” over others. These men not only developed a rhetoric which enabled them to have closer ties with, and greater influence on, their congregations, but also “infused the Lockean vocabulary with a moral significance, a severity and an urgency, and thereby translated the ideas of the social contract and natural law into a spur to popular activity.”<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the liberals’ incipient Deism caused them to see God as incapable of {40} intervening in the affairs of men to bring wayward nations to judgment, while the evangelicals’ assurance of the sovereignty of God and their postmillennial eschatology gave them an optimism and sense of mission which contrasted sharply with the cosmic pessimism of the rationalists. While liberals increasingly deferred to the civil authority, however, the evangelicals stressed the power of God working through redeemed souls. So fruitful was the evangelical activity that in the early 1750s, outraged Arminian rationalists complained that the only way for a minister to get into the graces of the populace was to espouse “calvinistick Principles.”<sup>109</sup> If the postmillennialism of the Awakening was to be disappointed, the moral and theological revival which it produced in colonial America would also bear fruit in the theological, and therefore moral and legal, assumptions of the revolutionary generation—assumptions buttressed and intensified by the political and doctrinal struggles and controversies produced by the Awakening itself.<sup>110</sup>

The Great Awakening revived the older religious outlook, but the long controversy over the establishment of an *episcopate in America* intensified the commitment of colonial dissenters to the inherited religion and to the freedom associated with it. The issue of church and

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107. Heimert’s and Gaustad’s “Calvinists.” As has been pointed out, however, their theology was implicitly Arminian.

108. Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 17–20.

109. *Ibid.*, 19, 43, 59–75.

110. Baldwin, *New England Clergy*, 80–81.

state inherent in the desire of many Anglican prelates to establish Anglicanism as the legal religion throughout the colonies had been a constant in Anglo-American relations ever since 1630, even in the Episcopal colonies, where congregational church polity existed in fact, if not in theory, in the parish vestries. But for eighty-six years after 1689, the Episcopal pressure increased intermittently, but inexorably, thus reinforcing the traditional teachings about law, compact, and freedom, and unconsciously preparing the minds of three or four generations of colonists for revolt. Religion had always been very real, immediate, and dear to most of the colonists, but the desire of many English—and later some American—Anglicans for “the complete Episcopal organization of the colonies,” a project which entailed a complete reordering of American society, made church and state, for eighty-five years, the greatest and most familiar issue before the colonial public.<sup>111</sup>

Many people from all the colonies and all classes contributed to fighting back the march of the Episcopalians, many of them, especially in the South, Episcopalians. But the leadership throughout the protracted struggle was supplied by “Mr. Otis’ black regiment,” the *dissenting clergy*. Although many of the southern Anglican clergy opposed the efforts of the Society for {41} the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) and a number of their northern brethren in the later stages of the controversy, it is not surprising to learn that the earliest and most intense leadership arose among the Congregationalists and Presbyterians of New England, from whence the controversy spread to the middle colonies and the South.<sup>112</sup> This is easily understood in light of the fact that at the heart of the controversy lay the spread of Arminian rationalism into areas once dominated by Puritan Calvinism,<sup>113</sup> and by the fact that behind much of the opposition to episcopacy, even among the Episcopalians, lay the association of enforced religious uniformity with unpleasant memories of Romanism.<sup>114</sup>

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111. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities and Politics, 1689–1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), xii–xiv, 215, 335, and passim.

112. *Ibid.*, 171–73, 176, 183, 190, 220, 334.

113. Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 28.

114. Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 172, 319–20, 322.



Buttressed by an increasingly popularized version of colonial history which saw religious and civil liberty as the reasons for and conditions established by the founding of the New England (and by extension and popularization, all) colonies, Presbyterian and Congregationalist divines, in numberless weekly sermons, taught their people the connection between the law of God and the law of nature, recounted the ministers' view of the history of the forefathers and the terrible threat of episcopacy, and increasingly exhorted them to keep the memory of the forefathers alive.<sup>115</sup> The opposition to episcopacy was facilitated by the influence of the clergy, the natural development of an *intercolonial communications network* along denominational lines and among Dissenters (the basis of the later committees of correspondence), the parallel development of a superb *intercontinental communication and intelligence service*, the aid of *sympathetic Dissenters in Parliament* and in the English press, and the superior use of the *colonial press* by opponents of episcopacy to inform and agitate the colonial population. So effective was the colonists' use of the press that during the height of the controversy it was able to mobilize and focus intercolonial American opinion directly on the threat to colonial liberty. Pulpit was united to press and even to tavern, as sermons and tracts were printed, reprinted, read, and discussed throughout the land.<sup>116</sup>

The amount of space allotted to *the issue of church and state* in the news columns of the press exceeded that of any other topic, including politics. But it would be a mistake to assume that religion was absent from what today are secular concerns, for there was a definite aura of social snobbery attached to the Anglican Church in the North and Middle colonies, and the "bishop's palace" at Cambridge, Massachusetts, soon became the symbol of threatened Episcopal magnificence and compulsory tithes for the {42} support of bishops and the clergy. The passage in the middle 1760s of such legislation as the Currency Act and the Stamp Act added fresh civil grievances to long-standing religious ones, thus precipitating a crisis. Nor were these civil grievances separable from religious ones. The Stamp Act, for example, required stamps upon all documents arising from ecclesiastical matters, and

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115. *Ibid.*, 171–77, 190.

116. *Ibid.*, 183–88, 190–93, 250, 257–58, 288, 329, 335–38, and *passim*.

required a two-pound (£2) stamp for donations, benefices to, and degrees “taken in ... any seminary of learning”; from this the Dissenters implied not only threats to their schools and colleges, but also the government’s intention of establishing ecclesiastical courts in the near future. The constant Anglican proselyting, aspersions on the ministry of the Dissenters, attacks on the colonies’ charters, and the leaking of Dr. Samuel Johnson’s plan for a complete constitutional reordering of the colonies in the early 1760s convinced the dissenting ministers and many of their followers that a distinction between religious and civil liberties no longer existed; “liberty itself,” as Bridenbaugh has said, “faced extinction, and they rushed to its defense.” Although 1772 was the last time the Anglicans approached the throne on the subject of an American episcopate, the colonists had no way of foreseeing that this would end the matter. In subsequent years they would well remember previous threats to their accustomed and divinely sanctioned ways.<sup>117</sup>

### *The Declaration of Independence*

If the motivation behind and the leading figures of the revolutionary effort were secular or deistic, it becomes difficult to explain several things. How does one explain the extent of Christian leadership and activity prior to and during the war? Why did it take the theological liberals until 1805—fully a generation *after* the war—to seize control of Harvard and the Unitarians until 1825 to organize formally? And how does one explain the markedly Christian content and intention of the state constitutions and of the state and local laws enacted after the revolution? Even the Declaration itself becomes difficult to explain.

The Declaration, of course, was not solely the work of Jefferson; his initial draft was modified in accordance with the wishes of the other members of the Congress. But if Jefferson is to be believed, his purpose in drafting the document was not to discover any new principles or set forth any new argument, but merely

...to place before mankind the common sense of the subject.... Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment nor yet copied from any particular previous writing, it was intended as an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and

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117. *Ibid.*, 207, 211–15, 230, 240–41, 256–58, 329–35, and *passim*.

spirit of the occasion. All its authority rests, then, on the harmonizing {43} sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, & c.<sup>118</sup>

Analysis of the Declaration as a testament of political philosophy is difficult, partly because it makes no pretense to be a fully developed philosophy of politics, but largely because it is a rhetorical document.<sup>119</sup> Even so, however, it is possible to learn from the Declaration much of the colonists' views of politics. In form, the Declaration is *a plea at law against the king in Parliament*, charging him with failure to uphold his contractual obligations as feudal lord over the colonies. As such, it is a powerful assertion that *rulers are under law*, that their powers, even though they be a popular or quasi-popular assembly, are limited by fundamental law, and that both George III and Parliament are unjustified in attempting to assert their supposed right to absolute rule. In both the English Revolution and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the validity of absolute power had been denied. That which was invalid in the hands of a king, the colonists were implicitly asserting, was no more valid if expressed through Parliament.<sup>120</sup> Neither king nor parliament, then, could be sovereign—absolute—because the powers of both were limited by laws which are no respecters of persons. Law is above government, not the reverse. What is the origin of this law?

The Declaration is not a secular document, nor can it properly be termed deistic. Not only is God's existence recognized, but also His power, justice, and goodness as Creator; He is seen as the ruler of nature, providential orderer of history, and "Supreme Judge of the World." Whatever the theological shortcomings of this characterization from the standpoints of the various denominations present in America

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118. Quoted in Cecelia Kenyon, "The Declaration of Independence," in *Fundamental Testaments of the American Revolution* (Washington, D C: Library of Congress, 1973), 24.

119. Rhetorical in the high, traditional sense: intended not only to persuade men to action, but also to teach them the high principles upon which to act.

120. M. E. Bradford, "Lincoln's New Frontier: A Rhetoric for Continuing Revolution," *Triumph*, May 1971, 12–13, 21. H. E. Egerton, *The Causes and Character of the American Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), n. 201. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 18–19, 29–30.

at this time, it is obvious that the God spoken of and appealed to here is not the remote, detached, “watchmaker” god of European Deism. God is the Creator and moral judge of man. Man is dependent on, not independent of, God. Since man has, contrary to the faith of modern evolutionary thought, a personal beginning, the existence of the individual has meaning.<sup>121</sup> This meaning is, at least for moral and political purposes, knowable to man, in the form of “the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” via the use of his reason—and probably {44} also via revelation<sup>122</sup>—and is not transferable from the individual to other individuals, nor to any larger collective entity. Because man is created by a God who is not only creator, but ruler of nature, providential governor of history, and supreme judge of the world, it would seem that man, in communication with that God, has a sound basis for metaphysics, epistemology, and morals.<sup>123</sup> To the extent that this analysis is true, the philosophically questionable appeal to self-evident truths becomes understandable. Because the individual is created by God and endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights, *knowledge* of his correlative *duties* to others, who are also endowed with the same inalienable rights, is available to the individual. The document’s emphasis on rights is understandable, given the medieval tradition of property rights, the Calvinistic emphasis on the sanctity of biblical law, some presence of the modern theory of natural rights, and the desire of the colonists to check absolutism.

Although the Declaration makes no reference to trinitarianism, the document’s teaching on individual rights and duties seems to reflect the Christian answer to the *one and many problem*, set forth in our era by Van Til.<sup>124</sup> The desire is to be one *and* many—one people, but thirteen free and independent states; or, more properly, a legitimate sphere for *governmental coercion* is recognized, but also a legitimate sphere of *individual freedom* from governmental coercion—a high purpose con-

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121. See Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, 10–18.

122. The phraseology certainly opens this possibility. Note the medieval and Reformation similarity between natural and divine law.

123. See Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, chs. 1–4, especially pp. 21–35, for the basic problems raised by modern man’s presuppositions, in contrast to those of Christianity.

tinued in the Articles of Confederation and in the Constitution. Moreover, the form of the Declaration, like that of the Ten Commandments, has the effect of maintaining a sense of the objectivity of truth—a sense of moral rightness—which establishes in men the central convictions which give them the courage to resist temptations to break the moral law. If God is the God of history and the source of moral law, then violations of the moral law are as objective as the existence of any physical substance. It is only in this connection, as Trueblood has pointed out, that the much disputed “equality” clause makes sense: men are not equal in intelligence, power, wealth, wisdom, or virtue, {45} but only in being morally responsible before their Creator. The equality spoken of in the Declaration is not the tyrannical leveling principle of modern egalitarianism. Thus,

In a merely humanistic context, the statement in the Declaration of Independence is nonsense, since, apart from God, there is no equality at all.<sup>125</sup>

The law can be no respecter of persons because God is no respecter of persons. In this context, not only the common law and Christian natural law theories, but also the rhetorical appeal of the Declaration to a law which stands above those who rule, becomes more comprehensible.<sup>126</sup>

Next to theologically related matters, such as personal devotions, *law* was the subject most studied by colonial Americans. Burke, in his speech on American taxation, noted that this rendered men “acute, inquisitive, dextrous, prompt in attack, ready in defense, full of

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124. See Rousas John Rushdoony, “The One and Many Problem: The Contribution of Van Til,” in E. R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), 339–48. Also see Rushdoony’s survey of Western thought in terms of this problem, *The One and the Many*. Verna M. Hall has compiled a very useful three-volume anthology, *The Christian History of the Constitution* (San Francisco: American Constitution Press, 1960–1968), but much work remains to be done on the Christian roots of the founding.

125. Trueblood, *Foundations for Reconstruction*, 14–20.

126. A different interpretation of the Declaration will be found in Carl Becker’s standard history of the subject, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Ideas* (New York: Vintage Books, [1922] 1961).

resources,” and disposed to judge on the basis of principle more than on the basis of actual grievances.<sup>127</sup> If the language of the Revolution was the language of lawyers more than that of theologians, it was precisely because a *relatively homogeneous theological heritage* imbued most Americans with a core of common convictions about the Source, and so the validity, of that law.<sup>128</sup>

As a plea addressed most immediately to men, the Declaration presupposes that men are different from mere brutes, in that men have both reason and the capacity for self-restraint; it speaks primarily to *men who manifest these qualities in a high degree*. Such men are *candid* men—disposed to change their opinions on important subjects, should reasoned argument convince them that they are in error. Thus, we have further evidence of the actual *inequalities* of men which are obscured by the popularly misunderstood “equality” clause. This also gives us an indication about the end of man, namely, the good life—a life in which reason is followed and developed (though not necessarily in Neoplatonic flight from material reality in order to achieve mere contemplation of the eternal essences). These superior men will, above all others, recognize that God has created men with certain inalienable, universally valid, and knowable rights. They will recognize the truth and justice of the colonists’ case, and thus will be persuaded that the king has acted unjustly, even tyrannically, {46} toward the Americans.<sup>129</sup> Such men will also recognize that the colonists’ recourse to arms is, as the whole form and content of the Declaration indicates, not truly rebellion, but really the prudent course, given the tyrannical designs of the king, by which to uphold the fundamental law.<sup>130</sup>

Thus the Declaration restates an old theme, first clearly stated in the Huguenot (French Calvinist) political thinker Philip Mornay’s *Vindi-*

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127. Quoted in Charles F. Mullett, *Fundamental Law and the American Revolution, 1760–1776* (New York: Octagon Books, [1933] 1966), 8. Mullett presents a good survey of the sources, but neglects the influence of the prevailing theological framework in America.

128. Jay noted this in *Federalist* no. 2: 9.

129. Eidelberg, *A Discourse on Statesmanship*, 443–51. Of interest as a possible Christian influence on the Declaration (and *Federalist*) re: the “candid world” to which the plea is addressed is *America’s Appeal to the Impartial World* (Hartford, CT: E. Watson, 1775), attributed to Moses Mather.

*ciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579), but widely circulated in America before the Revolution)—long before the rise of modern liberalism. The theme is traceable through such other Calvinistic activities and documents as the Dutch Declaration of Independence (1581) and the Puritan Army Debates (1647) to both the teachings of the colonial Puritans (and their descendants) and John Locke’s defense of limited government and the rights and liberties of Englishmen.<sup>131</sup> Though nothing explicit is said about a hierarchy among men, the Declaration is not so optimistic about human nature as Rossiter supposed. Man is created with inalienable rights, and yet the necessity of government to secure these rights implies an *ineradicable* flaw—quite like original sin (a concept obvious and omnipresent in the *Federalist*)—in man. This very flaw suggests the necessity of limitation on governmental power, and the blessing which is man’s in the existence of an objective, knowable moral order.

Man, though his actions are to be curbed in accordance with the divinely given moral law, being created with certain inalienable rights, remains, as DeKoster has said, not a maker of his own destiny, but a creature with a destiny. This destiny is inextricably bound to the exercise and honor of these divinely endowed rights.<sup>132</sup> Among these natural and divinely ordained rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The similarity to the Lockean triad of life, liberty, and property is evident, especially in the extensive bill of particulars against the king. Drawn from the common law and constituting the largest—and central—part of the plea, the bill of particulars delineates the violation not of abstract principles but of inherited and customary (as well as natural) *property rights*. There is no right to an equality of condition either stated or implied here. On the contrary, property rights are clearly among the inalienable rights {47} violated by the king, and so are connected with the self-evident truths,<sup>133</sup> as well as with liberty and

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130. The right of rebellion against tyrants is asserted in *Federalist* no. 28, while the importance of prudence is an omnipresent theme. See also Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 33–40.

131. Rushdoony, *ibid.*; Hyma, *Christianity and Politics*, and Davies, *Foundations of American Freedom*. Again, though his temperament was otherwise, this position was implicit in Calvin’s stress on the sovereignty of God and the majesty of His law.

132. Lester DeKoster, *Vocabulary of Communism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), 13.

the pursuit of happiness.<sup>134</sup> The right to the *pursuit*, rather than the condition (as in the North Vietnamese Declaration of Independence), of happiness is a right of the individual to be free from being forced to conform to a unitary definition of happiness. It is thus the right to pursue—within moral limits!—one’s own understanding of happiness.<sup>135</sup> This allows for diversity and socioeconomic inequality, as does the protection of property rights. Finally, as in *Federalist* no. 10, happiness opens the possibility that the individual will wish to acquire nonmaterial things, or property that is not material: ideas, opinions, knowledge.

Kenyon has criticized the Declaration as an individualistic document lacking a philosophy by which to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate interests, as lacking a philosophy which establishes a definite hierarchy of values by which every opinion and interest could be measured and assigned its proper place in the ordered scheme of things. She has pointed out the difficulty of giving precise definitions of the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, rights which are claimed to be self-evident.<sup>136</sup>

While the individualism of Locke and Classical Liberalism is perhaps present in the Declaration, however, so too are such premodern systems of thought as common law and Christianity. In fact, these are even more evident than the Lockeanism so commonly attributed to the document.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, the openness of the Declaration to vertical socioeconomic mobility does not imply a state of intellectual and moral relativism. The text of the document cannot be understood, in

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133. Self-evident truths—a theme which appears in the opening paragraphs of *Federalist* no. 31—are only self-evident because of common presuppositional starting points for diverse individuals: again, the common religious background.

134. Benjamin F. Wright, *Consensus and Continuity*, 6. Property rights have their origin in biblical law (specifically, in the prohibitions against stealing and covetousness, though not only these), and their theoretical expression in the medieval natural law teaching. See Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*.

135. Eidelberg, *A Discourse on Statesmanship*, 443–51.

136. Kenyon, “Declaration of Independence,” 35–38.

137. On the problems of Lockeanizing the Declaration, see M. E. Bradford. Professor Bradford has also dealt with this common error, with the misreading of the Declaration as an egalitarian document, and with related questions in “The Heresy of Equality: Bradford Replies to Jaffa,” *Modern Age* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1976):62–67.



this regard, without an understanding of the context of a *basic moral consensus*, founded on similarities of theology and tradition, within which, and to which, the document was conceived and addressed. As Kenyon notes, “liberty was a word with a legal and constitutional history in the eighteenth century, and that history supplied some consensus as to its meaning.” That “Jefferson’s contemporaries knew or felt the difference between liberty and license” is certain. That they knew not how to define that difference with precision {48} is less certain.<sup>138</sup> That the Declaration sets forth no clearly defined hierarchy of values according to which one can resolve clashes between rights of different individuals is beside the point, given its rhetorical intent, which is neither to establish detailed blueprints by which all men should live, nor to bring forth the “new nation” claimed by Mr. Lincoln. *Its intent is to establish the justice of the thirteen colonies becoming free and independent states in order to maintain their inherited ways and law.* Furthermore, the text does recognize the role of *prudence*, the controlling virtue of classical politics. Both medieval and classical politics, even with their hierarchies of values and bias in favor of the ruler(s) of church or *polis*, were ultimately driven back to prudential judgments by the ruler(s) in terms of the applicability of different values to given situations. Finally, in analyzing the Declaration, one should not commit the error of its Lockeanizers. The document must be exegetically studied as a whole containing not only the rather abstract second paragraph, but also many other politically relevant comments. The American patriots had, in the common law (which is perhaps most neglected by the Lockeanizers), a standard which to a very large degree—via precedent—enabled them both to distinguish between conflicting rights and to stand free of arbitrary rule by an ultimately all-powerful state. The Declaration was not a document intended to legitimize simple (narrow) self-interest, nor was it a document seeking to subordinate the self-interest of the individual, after the fashion of earlier and later collectivist systems, to the will of the ruler(s) or to an abstract common

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138. This depends, of course, on whom one is talking about. One would expect the biblically oriented to have far less difficulty with this decision than their rationalistic neighbors—especially if the latter were true to their presuppositions. Intellectual and moral distinctions also are relevant.

good. Both individualism and community are present.<sup>139</sup> The Declaration saw *self-interest* as bounded by *knowable moral laws*, in (at least) the form of others' rights, and sought to maintain *a balance* between the legitimate interests of the individual and the good of the body politic, a high purpose evident in the Constitution and obvious in *Federalist* no. 10.

Despite the political proclivity of its principal author to approximate the individualism of the *Second Treatise on Government*, the Declaration is not a Lockean document,<sup>140</sup> if by that term one means a testament of the political faith of early modern liberalism. Not only is the evocation of sacred honor, with which the colonists' plea ends, pre-Lockean and premodern, but providential God to whom it appeals is foreign to Lockean politics.<sup>141</sup> True, the *doctrine of natural rights* was the major *political* {49} premise of the Declaration, and without this doctrine there probably would have been no revolution. But the origin of this doctrine is in the biblical heritage, from the medieval period onward, and the meaning behind the language of natural law and natural rights, so prominent in the eighteenth century, was *Christian* as well as Lockean.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, in the Declaration the doctrine of natural law and natural rights was based on theological grounds: Christian theological grounds. The same holds true of the idea of the *contractual basis of society*, which is traceable to medieval coronation ceremonies of kings,<sup>143</sup> but especially, as has been seen, to the medieval and Calvinistic doctrine of the covenant and to the federal theology of New England Puritanism. These far antedate Locke. The Dutch Declaration

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139. David W. Minar, *Ideas and Politics: The American Experience* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1964), 80–81.

140. Or at least not *mainly* a Lockean document.

141. Lockean texts presuppose a God who has created certain knowable rights into the nature of things, but this God does not intervene in history. See Leo Strauss, "John Locke as 'Authoritarian,'" *Intercollegiate Review* 4, no. 1 (November-December 1967):46–48.

142. Kirk, *Roots of American Order*, 112–13; Becker, *Declaration of Independence*, x, ix; Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 1–8. Note especially the Christian influence on Jefferson and Franklin; Baldwin, *New England Clergy*; Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*.

143. Kenyon, "Declaration of Independence," 27.

of Independence (1581), itself profoundly influenced by Calvinism and the *Vindiciae* (1579) is the first document in modern times to emphasize that rulers are responsible to the people and can be deposed by the people—led by the lesser magistrates—for ruling tyrannically, an idea central to constitutional and republican government.<sup>144</sup> It is not beside the point that the Dutch Declaration explicitly justifies this not only on the basis of *contract*, but upon that of *natural law* and the *ancient ways* of the people and provinces.<sup>145</sup> Finally, it should be remembered that the colonists quoted Locke as they quoted others: where he defended liberty and property, not where he advocated majoritarianism.<sup>146</sup> The American Declaration does see government as based on a *contract*, having as its end the *security of individuals' rights*. Government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed—though not only from this, given the validity of the laws of nature and of nature's God—and is changeable or temporarily removable if it becomes destructive of the ends for which it is instituted. But it is a mistake to see the argument of the Declaration as totally or even dominantly Lockean.

The largest, and central, part of the Declaration, the bill of particular charges against the king and Parliament, further defines and substantiates the principles set forth in the document's second paragraph. It incorporates George III's violation of the colonists' traditional and natural rights not under Lockean philosophy but under the *common law*. The right of individuals to be free of arbitrary and unlawful rule is much in evidence, {50} as are property rights. The concept of property rights is also elaborated to include the right to free trade with consenting parties in other nations. Though some scholars have maintained that the actual effect of British mercantilistic restrictions on economic freedom and prosperity in the colonies was slight,<sup>147</sup> to a people so

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144. Hyma, *Christianity and Politics*, 161–70.

145. *Ibid.*, 167–70.

146. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 20. Gummere arrives at a similar conclusion about the colonists use of classical authors: the colonists used them to buttress their own position.

147. John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1943), 124.

schooled in the law the matter of concern was not so much the degree of injury done by *violations of fundamental law and liberties* as the fact of violation of the principles of that law and of those liberties. The very fact of the disregard of these fundamental constitutional principles by those in power meant that the way was left open for graver injuries in the future, and even for the abolition (in practice) of those principles. The abolition of “the free System of English Laws in a neighboring Province,” a clear reference to Canada, evoked the threat of the eventual introduction of arbitrary and absolute rule into the colonies, a threat which also evoked memories of the long-standing and recently renewed episcopal controversy, with its attendant implications of Romanism, enforced national religious uniformity and persecution. Few in the colonies—Protestant or Catholic—desired such a possibility.

In light of the above considerations, it is not surprising that the authors of the Declaration appeal for the justice of their cause and the rectitude of their intentions not only to the candid men to whom the Declaration is addressed, but ultimately to “the Supreme Judge of the World.” It is on the protection of His “divine Providence” that they rely for support of the Declaration and of the independence movement; and it is upon the support of His divine providence that they mutually pledge to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.<sup>148</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Just as the Declaration conjoins the past to the present in its incorporation of natural law, divine law, and common law, so the principles contained in the Declaration’s embodiment of these fundamental laws and rights were incorporated into the Constitution, concretely in the Bill of Rights, and most obviously in the ninth and tenth amendments.<sup>149</sup> But as to the causes of the former document and of the momentous war which gave it birth, we must join Mr. Roche’s meta-

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148. The Constitution, though not so obvious in what its authors considered the source of their obligation, also concludes with an acknowledgement of the Christian God: “Done ... in the year of our Lord ...”

149. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 15–16.

physicians—though certainly not his gnostics. Piety, religious worship, and even theology were part of the daily existence of our forefathers of the eighteenth century:

no understanding of the eighteenth century is possible if we unconsciously {51} omit, or consciously jam out, the religious theme just because our own milieu is secular. The era of the Enlightenment was far more an Age of Faith (and Emotion) than an Age of Reason.... Religion had always been very real, immediate and dear to the colonists.... The truth of this is not lost upon us if we approach this era by coming up to it from the deeply pious seventeenth century rather than by glancing backward from the impious twentieth.<sup>150</sup>

The main roots of the War for Independence were religious, not secular, Christian, not humanistic. Indeed, we can very moderately say with Van Tyne:

Different issues were at different periods uppermost in men's minds, and, though they might at times seem most concerned with economic grievances, the religious one was deep and abiding.<sup>151</sup>

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150. Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, xi–xii, xiv.

151. Van Tyne, *Causes of the War*, 354.

# THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

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*John W. Robbins*

Political philosophy is not a subject that can be discussed apart from other subjects; it is not a discrete discipline that can be neatly sequestered and dissected. Being a sub-philosophy, it presupposes answers to certain fundamental questions: How does one know? What is the nature of man? Does history have a purpose? and so on. Consequently, to understand the political philosophy of the Founders, it will be necessary to see how they answered some of these preliminary questions. Only if one grasps their view of the nature of man and power will one be able to understand their emphasis upon checks and balances and limited government. Apart from such an understanding, all their concern about checks and balances will appear as so much sterile theorizing, or game playing—or model constructing. Let us begin, then, with the question of the nature of man.

## *The Founders' View of Human Nature*

Not having had the benefit of existentialist philosophy and not accepting the Enlightenment optimism about the nature of man, the Founders believed that there indeed was such a thing as human nature, and that it was evil. There is, in the words of Madison, a “degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust.”<sup>152</sup> Madison speaks of the “caprice and wickedness of man,”<sup>153</sup> and of the “infirmities and depravities of the human character.”<sup>154</sup> Phrases like these could be multiplied, but these are sufficient to show that the Founders, or at least Madison, co-author of the *Federalist*, and putative Father of the Constitution, did not succumb to that

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152. *Federalist*, Rossiter ed., no. 55:346.

153. *Ibid.*, 353.

154. *Ibid.*, no. 37:231.

childish optimism about the goodness of human nature that characterized so much of eighteenth-century thought. Hamilton, another author of the *Federalist*, remarks upon the “folly and wickedness of mankind,”<sup>155</sup> and declares that he regards “human nature as it is, without flattering its virtue or exaggerating its vices.”<sup>156</sup> Consequently, he believes that “men are ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious.”<sup>157</sup>

This pessimistic view of man is shared by Jay, the third author of the *Federalist*, who sees men as governed by “dictates of personal interest”<sup>158</sup> and who will therefore “swerve from good faith and justice.”<sup>159</sup> Even Jefferson, {53} who, along with Franklin, is cited as the Founder most influenced by Enlightenment thought, pointed out that

Free government is founded on jealousy, not in confidence; it is jealousy and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions, to bind those we are obliged to trust with power. In questions of power, let no more be heard of confidence in man but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the constitution.<sup>160</sup>

John Adams was of the opinion that

Every man hates to have a superior, but no man is willing to have an equal; every man desires to be superior to all others.... We may look as wise and moralize as gravely as we will; we may call this desire of distinction childish and silly; but we cannot alter the nature of men....<sup>161</sup>

Samuel Adams, usually regarded as one of the radicals, believed that such is “the depravity of mankind that ambition and lust of power above the law are ... predominant passions in the breasts of most men.”<sup>162</sup>

From all this evidence, we can see that the Founders generally were quite skeptical about human nature. But while they perceived the

155. *Ibid.*, no. 78:471.

156. *Ibid.*, no. 76:458.

157. *Ibid.*, no. 6:54.

158. *Ibid.*, no. 2:40.

159. *Ibid.*, no. 3:43.

160. *Resolution Relative to the Alien and Sedition Laws* (1798).

161. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With a Life of the Author*, vol. 6, ed. Charles Adams (Boston, 1850–1856), 209.

162. *The Diary and Autobiography of Samuel Adams*, vol. 2, 59.

depravity of human nature, that depravity was not absolute. Man was a mixture of good and evil. As Madison put it,

As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form.<sup>163</sup>

Hamilton believed that the “supposition of universal venality in human nature is little less an error ... than the supposition of universal rectitude.”<sup>164</sup> Yet this qualification of the Founders’ view of man must not be exaggerated. One of the ablest students of the *Federalist* has cautioned that

No matter how often the authors admit that there are people who are sufficiently reasonable and good to be trusted with self-government, the *Federalist* entertains, on the whole, a rather pessimistic view of human nature.<sup>165</sup>

The views of Adams and Washington were very similar to those of Madison and Hamilton; again, the only possible exceptions of any importance are Jefferson and Franklin, the first of whom did not participate in the writing of the Constitution.<sup>166</sup> {54}

Skepticism about the present state of human nature, however, is not the total picture. Human nature is not malleable by human means. Men would always be men. Dietze writes concerning the *Federalist*:

This raises the question of whether the contributors to this American classic believe that man can be improved. The answer is in the negative. No millennium is foreseen in which human selfishness would disappear and in which it would be possible to live happily without the restraints of government. All kinds of men, whether poor or rich,

163. *Federalist*, no. 55:346.

164. *Ibid.*, no. 76:458.

165. Gottfried Dietze, *The Federalist*, 259.

166. Bailyn writes that “this basic concept of human nature [as evil], which would attain its greatest fame in the *Federalist*, appears full blown in the colonies well before the Revolutionary years, and may be traced back, intact, to the early eighteenth-century transmitters of English opposition thought,” in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 61n.



whether of common or aristocratic stock, are selfish and always will be.<sup>167</sup>

The idea that human nature would be transformed in the future was something quite foreign to the Founders; they lived, fortunately for us, before the time of Marx and Darwin. As John Adams wrote,

the perfectibility of man is only human and terrestrial perfectibility. Cold will still freeze, and fire will never cease to burn; disease and vice will continue to disorder and death to terrify mankind.<sup>168</sup>

### *The Founders' View of Power*

Because they regarded men as incorrigible, the Founders distrusted any aggregation of political power. Jefferson has already been quoted on the necessity of limiting the powers of the government by a constitution. Madison, in *Federalist* no. 51, concerns himself with the problem of power and its containment:

But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defense must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.<sup>169</sup>

Benjamin Rush, in his "Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," declared that under the Pennsylvania constitution, {55}

the supreme, absolute, and uncontrolled power of the State is ... in the hands of *one body* of men. Had it been lodged in the hands of one man, it would have been less dangerous to the safety and liberties of the community. Absolute power should never be trusted to man.<sup>170</sup>

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167. Dietze, *The Federalist*, 259.

168. *Works of John Adams*, vol. 6, 279.

169. *Federalist*, no. 51:321–22.

Jefferson attacked the Constitution of his native Virginia on much the same grounds in his “Notes on Virginia”:

All the powers of government, legislative, executive, and judiciary, results to the legislative body. The concentrating these in the same hands is precisely the definition of despotic governments. It will be no alleviation that these powers will be exercised by a plurality of hands, and not by a single one. One hundred and seventy-three despots would surely be as oppressive as one.... An *elective despotism* was not the government we fought for, but one which should not only be founded on free principles, but in which the powers of government should be so divided and balanced among several bodies of magistracy, as that no one could transcend their legal limits, without being effectually checked and restrained by the others.<sup>171</sup>

Jefferson, while he may have been more optimistic about human nature *per se* than other Founders, was certainly not optimistic about the goodness of men possessing power. Whether Jefferson thought, as Acton was later to say, that “power tends to corrupt,” is difficult to say. What is not difficult to say is that Jefferson distrusted men with political power.<sup>172</sup>

John Adams expressed his distrust of both human nature and political power by noting that under the new state constitution, “The people will have unbounded power. And the people are extremely addicted to corruption and venality, as well as the great.”<sup>173</sup> Democrats, the Founders were not. Adams expressed his views that it is wrong “to flatter the democratical portion of society”; after all,

There is no reason to believe the one [the people] much honester or wiser than the other [kings or nobility]; they are all of the same clay;

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170. Dagobert D. Runes, ed., *The Selected Works of Benjamin Rush* (New York, 1947), 57. Quoted by Gottfried Dietze, *America's Political Dilemma: From Limited to Unlimited Democracy* (Johns Hopkins, 1968), 145.

171. *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden, 237.

172. Samuel Adams did believe that power tends to corrupt: It “converts a good man in private life to a tyrant in office”; it “is known to be intoxicating in its nature”; and reason and religion have never “been sufficiently powerful to restrain these lusts of men.” *Diary and Autobiography*, vol. 2, 59.

173. *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield, et al. (Cambridge, 1963), vol. 2, 27–28.

their minds and bodies are alike ... as to usurping others' rights, they are all three [kings, nobles, people] equally guilty when unlimited in power. No wise man will trust either with an opportunity; and every judicious legislator will set all three to watch and control each other ... the people, when they have been unchecked, have been as unjust, tyrannical, brutal, barbarous, and cruel, as any king or senate possessed {56} of uncontrollable power. The majority has eternally, without one exception, usurped the rights of the minority.<sup>174</sup>

Adams wrote his *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* partially in rejoinder to a letter written by the French *philosophe* Turgot, in which Turgot criticized the constitutions of the United States as too imitative of the British in their concern for separation of powers. What they needed, wrote Turgot, was a greater centralization of power, not a fragmentation of power. Herein lies a major difference between French political thought and the thought of the Founding Fathers. Always wary of concentrated power, they objected not only to monarchy and aristocracy, but to democracy as well. Madison, in the *Federalist* no. 10, wrote that in a pure democracy,

There is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.<sup>175</sup>

Thomas Paine, the English author of *Common Sense*, did not speak for the Founding Fathers on this issue, just as he did not on others. In Adams's opinion, Paine "seems to have very inadequate ideas of what is proper and necessary to be done in order to form constitutions for single colonies, as well as a great model of union for the whole."<sup>176</sup> The major objection to *Common Sense* was, in Adams's words, that Paine's plan

was so democratical, without any restraint or even an attempt at any equilibrium or counterpoise, that it must produce confusion and every evil work.<sup>177</sup>

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174. *Works of John Adams*, vol. 6, 10.

175. *Federalist*, no. 10:81.

176. *Adams Family Correspondence*, vol. 1, 363.

Not being democrats, nor monarchists, nor aristocrats, what were the Founders? To a man, they were republicans, and “republic,” for them, had a specific meaning. A republic was, first of all, larger in physical size than a democracy.<sup>178</sup> Second, it was a system of representative government.<sup>179</sup> Third, it was a government of checks and balances.<sup>180</sup> And fourth, it was a limited government.<sup>181</sup> Despite all their rhetoric about the sovereignty of the people, the Founders did not want the “people”—whoever they are—to be sovereign in the sense of having unlimited power. The “sovereignty of the people” seems to have the strict meaning that the {57} people, *in extremis*, have the right “to alter or abolish” their government if it becomes destructive of its proper end. Popular sovereignty was something that existed outside of the political system. Within the system no one and no group was sovereign. Power would check power; ambition would check ambition.

To what expedient, then shall we finally resort, for maintaining in practice the necessary partition of power among the several departments as laid down in the Constitution? The only answer that can be given is that as all these exterior provisions are found to be inadequate the defect must be supplied, by so contriving the interior structure of the government that as its several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places ... the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others.... Ambition must be made to counteract ambition....<sup>182</sup>

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177. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield, et al. (Cambridge, 1961), vol. 3, 333.

178. See Madison, *Federalist*, no. 10.

179. *Ibid.*

180. *Ibid.*, and no. 51.

181. *Ibid.*, no. 78.

182. *Ibid.*, no. 51:320–22. John Adams wrote, “A legislative, an executive, and a judicial power comprehend the whole of what is meant and understood by government. It is by balancing each of these powers against the other two that the efforts in human nature towards tyranny can alone be checked and restrained and any degree of freedom preserved in the constitution” (*Works of John Adams*, vol. 4, 186).

There was none of the Lockean view of legislative supremacy in the normative thought of the Founders. Instead, they feared that the legislature might draw all power into itself, and so divided it into two bodies. Britain was the home of legislative supremacy, and the Founders desired to create in America what Britain was putatively—and erroneously—believed to possess, a genuine separation of powers.

But a separation of powers was not enough. There must also be a limitation on the power of the central government. The Founders did not intend to create another English Parliament. That body, to quote Sir William Blackstone and Sir Edward Coke,

is so transcendent and absolute, that it cannot be confined either for causes or persons, within any bound.... It hath sovereign and uncontrollable authority in the making, confirming, enlarging, restraining, abrogating, repealing, reviving, and expounding of laws, concerning matters of all possible denominations; ecclesiastical or temporal; civil, military, maritime, or criminal; this being the place where that absolute despotic power which must, in all governments, reside somewhere, is intrusted by the Constitution of these kingdoms.... It [Parliament] can change and create afresh even the Constitution of the kingdom.... It can, in short, do everything that is not naturally impossible to be done; and, therefore, some have not scrupled to call its power, by a figure rather too bold, the omnipotence of Parliament.<sup>183</sup>

Contrast this declaration of unlimited power with the *Federalist*:  
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Some who have not denied the necessity of the power of taxation have grounded a very fierce attack against the constitution, on the language in which it is defined. It has been urged and echoed that the power “to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts, and excises, to pay the debts, and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States,” amounts to an unlimited commission to exercise every power which may be alleged to be necessary for the common defense or general welfare. No stronger proof could be given of the distress under which the writers labor for objections, than their stooping to such a misconstruction ... what color can the objection have, when a specification of the objects alluded to by these general terms immediately follows and is not even separated by a longer pause than a semicolon?<sup>184</sup>

183. Quoted by Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.

184. *Federalist*, no. 41:262–63.

The central government, under both the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution, was to be a government of enumerated and delegated powers, not a government of innumerable and original powers. Only by tying men down with the chains of the Constitution could one hope to create and maintain a free society.

### *The Founders' View of Conspiracies*

Because they were convinced that men are envious, ambitious, and untrustworthy by nature, the Founders logically were suspicious of any evidences of intrigue, cabal, or conspiracy among men. Perhaps the most famous example of their concern with conspiracy is that found in the Declaration of Independence: “But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism....” This Declaration, of course, was written by Jefferson and passed by the Second Continental Congress, but the concern with conspiracy was pervasive. As Bailyn has pointed out,

What the leaders of the Revolutionary movement themselves said lay behind the convulsion of the time—what they themselves said was the cause of it all—was nothing less than a deliberate “design”—a conspiracy—of ministers of state and their underlings to overthrow the British Constitution, both in England and America, and to blot out, or at least severely reduce, English liberties. So it was commonly said. But by whom? It was said not merely by acknowledged firebrands like Samuel Adams ... but by every major leader of the Revolutionary movement in the years before independence: by John Adams, continuously, elaborately, year after year from 1765 to 1775, in his private as well as his public writings; by the cautious, conservative lawyer John Dickinson ... ; by Thomas Jefferson....<sup>185</sup>

Not being under the sway of Marx or Hegel, the Founders did not assign much importance to the idea that history is governed by blind, impersonal {59} “forces” and that human action is, at best, an epiphenomenon. Ideas do have consequences, but only if they are held by persons. One does not revolt against ideas, nor even against laws—if one believes that the lawmakers are not maliciously and deliberately

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185. Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1967), 11–12.

making bad laws; one revolts against evil men with evil purposes. The Americans seceded from the British Empire because

They saw about them, with increasing clarity, not merely mistaken, or even evil, policies violating the principles upon which freedom rested, but what appeared to be evidence of nothing less than a deliberate assault launched surreptitiously by plotters against liberty both in England and in America.<sup>186</sup>

George Washington and George Mason, writing the Fairfax Resolves of 1774, declared that the problem had been caused by a “regular, systematic plan” of oppression. In a private letter, Washington expressed his belief that “these measures are the result of deliberation.... I am as fully convinced as I am of my own existence that there has been a regular, systematic plan formed to enforce them.”<sup>187</sup>

The issue of conspiracy, Bailyn writes, was the crucial issue. Without belief in a ministerial conspiracy against the freedom of Americans and Englishmen, there would have been no secession:

That this was the issue, for thoughtful and informed people, on which decisions of loyalty to the government turned is nowhere so clearly and sensitively related as in the record of Peter Van Schaack.<sup>188</sup>

Van Schaack, it seems, used Locke to oppose the patriots; and the crucial issue in his mind was whether or not there was a conspiracy against the rights of Englishmen. If there were not, then, Van Schaack wrote,

I cannot therefore think the government *dissolved*; and as long as the society lasts, the power that every individual gave the society when he entered into it, can never revert to the individual again but will always remain in the community.<sup>189</sup>

The Founders’ belief in the evil of human nature, the untrustworthiness of men with power, and their disbelief in impersonal historical “forces” led them, quite logically, to a suspicion of conspiracies in high places.

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186. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 95.

187. *Ibid.*, 120.

188. *Ibid.*, 149.

189. *Ibid.*, 150.

### *The Founders' View of Human Rights*

One of the problems of dealing with the political thought of the Founders is its compactness. By this I mean that the Founders held certain ideas that were in themselves inconsistent, yet the inconsistency entirely or largely {60} escaped their notice. I have previously alluded to their belief in limited government, government limited by a higher law, the Constitution, and also to their belief that the people are sovereign. The conflict between these ideas was not apparent to the Founders, nor was the conflict between the ideas of innate, inalienable rights and justice.<sup>190</sup> The rhetoric of human rights was pervasive, yet ambiguous. There was no idea—so common among present-day libertarians and other right-wing hippies—that rights exist apart from God. The most famous statement of human rights, that contained in the Declaration of Independence, declared that men “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Atheism was unknown among the Founders; Jefferson and Franklin were, at worst, Deists. And a man like Adams could wax prophetic in his analysis of the consequences of political atheism:

Is there a possibility that the government of nations may fall into the hands of men who teach the most disconsolate of all creeds, that men are but fireflies and that this all is without a father? Is this the way to make man, as man, an object of respect? Or is it to make murder itself as indifferent as shooting a plover, and the extermination of the Rohilla nation as innocent as the swallowing of mites on a morsel of cheese?<sup>191</sup>

Adams was quick to grasp that the eradication of the God of the Bible must inevitably lead to the eradication of men, who are, after all, made in the image of God.

The ideas of human rights and God as the grantor of those rights were so closely intertwined in the thought of some of the Founders that they were not aware of the radically anti-Christian implications of the notion of inalienable rights. For an example of this juxtaposition—and

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190. For a discussion of the logical contradictions involved in believing the ideas of justice and inalienable rights, see the author's *Answer to Ayn Rand*, 116–21.

191. *Works of John Adams*, vol. 6, 281.



even identification—of human rights and God’s law, another quotation from Adams will serve:

Property is surely a right of mankind as really as liberty.... The moment, the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If THOU SHALT NOT COVET, and THOU SHALT NOT STEAL, were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be civilized or made free.<sup>192</sup>

No current defender of human rights would make such a statement, simply because the implicit humanism of the idea of innate and inalienable {61} human rights has become explicit. Man can stand alone now; he has no need of God or God’s law; his own nature is the source of his rights. This process of differentiation began with the War for Independence, and reached its logical culmination in the French Revolution. Cut loose from any ties to divine law, the notion of human rights expanded, so that there was no logical stopping place between the right to life, and the right to have one’s life maintained by others. Cut loose from its theistic and biblical basis, the notion of innate human rights led logically to the terror. Fortunately, for us, this development did not occur in America at the time of the Revolution or during the framing of the Constitution. Our institutions were already established before the humanism present in the notion of human rights became predominant.<sup>193</sup>

There was another characteristic of the Founders’ use of the idea of human rights that ought not to be overlooked: its rootedness in law and history. As Bailyn notes:

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192. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

193. The movement of thought can be seen in one quotation from John Dickinson: “We claim them [rights] from a higher source—from the King of kings, and Lord of all the earth. They are not annexed to us by parchments and seals. They are created in us by the decrees of Providence, which establish the laws of our nature. They are born with us; exist with us; and cannot be taken from us by any human power without taking our lives. In short, they are founded on the immutable maxims of reason and justice.” “An Address to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbados ...” (Philadelphia, 1766). Quoted in Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 187.

But what were these all-important “natural rights”? They were defined in a significantly ambiguous way. They were understood to be at one and the same time the inalienable, indefeasible rights inherent in people as such, and the concrete specifications of English law.<sup>194</sup>

The airy—and, of more importance, erroneous—abstractions of the *philosophes*, the disdain for history displayed by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, played a very small part in the natural-right thinking of the Founders. Their concern was for the rights of Englishmen, and the rights of Englishmen were spelled out adequately, if not completely, in the common law. Codification of rights was an impossibility:

To claim more, to assert that all rights might be written into a comprehensive bill or code was surely, James Otis declared, “the insolence of a haughty and imperious minister ... the flutter of a coxcomb, the pedantry of a quack, and the nonsense of a pettifogger.”<sup>195</sup>

The best that could be hoped for was a minimal statement of the rights of men, and that statement, according to Alexander Hamilton, was the Constitution itself:

The truth is, after all the declamations we have heard, that the Constitution {62} is itself, in every rational sense, and to every useful purpose, A BILL OF RIGHTS.<sup>196</sup>

The Constitution which Hamilton was writing about was, of course, the Constitution without the first ten amendments, those we commonly call the Bill of Rights. The rights of the people were spelled out not in positive phrases, but in negative terms; Hamilton found positive terms meaningless:

What signifies a declaration that “the liberty of the press shall be inviolably preserved”? What is the liberty of the press? Who can give it any definition which would not leave the utmost latitude for evasion?

Hamilton preferred the “thou shalt nots”:

Judgment in cases of impeachment shall not....

The privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus* shall not....

No bill of attainder or *ex post facto* law....

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194. *Ibid.*, 77.

195. *Ibid.*, 78.

196. *Federalist*, no. 84:515.

No title of nobility....

No attainder of treason shall work corruption of blood....<sup>197</sup>

Hamilton went even further and argued that bills of rights appended to the Constitution could pose a serious danger:

I go further and affirm that bills of rights, in the sense and to the extent in which they are contended for, are not only unnecessary in the proposed Constitution but would even be dangerous. They would contain various exceptions to the powers which are not granted; and, on this very account, would afford a colorable pretext to claim more than were granted. For why declare that things shall not be done which there is no power to do? Why, for instance should it be said that the liberty of the press shall not be restrained, when no power is given by which restrictions may be imposed? I will not contend that such a provision would confer a regulatory power; but it is evident that it would furnish, to men disposed to usurp, a plausible pretense for claiming that power.<sup>198</sup>

Indeed, in the first *Federalist* published, Hamilton noted that

a dangerous ambition more often lurks behind the specious mask of zeal for the rights of the people than under the forbidding appearance of zeal for the firmness and efficiency of government. History will teach us that the former has been found a much more certain road to the introduction of despotism than the latter, and that of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people, commencing demagogues and ending tyrants.<sup>199</sup>

Madison believed that bills of rights were useless:

[E]xperience proves the inefficacy of a bill of rights on those occasions when its control is most needed. Repeated violations of the parchment barriers have been committed by overbearing majorities in {63} every state. In Virginia I have seen the bill of rights violated in every instance where it has been opposed to a popular current.<sup>200</sup>

Madison was fond of the phrase, “parchment barriers,” and used it in the *Federalist* to show that the government, through checks and bal-

197. *Ibid.*, 513–14.

198. *Ibid.*, 511.

199. *Ibid.*, no. 1:35.

200. Letter from Madison to Jefferson, 17 October 1788, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, vol. 19, 19.

ances, must be constituted so as to limit itself; even “thou shalt nots” are ineffectual if all power be given to one body. If human rights are to be protected by government, then the government must be limited in its powers, and divided in its functions.

### *The Sources of the Founders’ Political Philosophy*

In this bicentennial era, nearly everyone with an axe to grind will be taking credit for the American Revolution, for it was, and remains, the only successful Revolution in the world. Irving Kristol has expressed this idea in these words:

It was a mild and relatively bloodless revolution. A war was fought, to be sure, and soldiers died in that war. But the rules of civilized warfare, as then established, were for the most part quite scrupulously observed by both sides: there was none of the butchery which we have come to accept as a natural concomitant of revolutionary warfare. More important, there was practically none of the off-battlefield savagery which we now assume to be inevitable in revolutions. There were no revolutionary tribunals dispensing “revolutionary justice”; there was no reign of terror; there were no bloodthirsty proclamations by the Continental Congress. Tories were dispossessed of their property, to be sure, and many were rudely hustled off into exile; but so far as I have been able to determine, not a single Tory was executed for harboring counterrevolutionary opinions.... As Tocqueville later remarked, with only a little exaggeration, the Revolution “contracted no alliance with the turbulent passions of anarchy, but its course was marked, on the contrary, by a love of order and law.”<sup>201</sup>

What accounts for this restraint, this reluctance, in the Revolution? The answer to that question must be sought in the sources upon which the thought of the Founders—both leaders and followers—drew. The difficulty, or one of the difficulties, involved in tracing such influence is sorting out the determinative sources from those used for their rhetorical effects. The Founders, particularly the authors of the *Federalist*, for example, made frequent allusions to and mentions of the writers of classical antiquity. But, as Bailyn points out,

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201. “The American Revolution as a Successful Revolution,” *America’s Continuing Revolution* (1974), 9.

This elaborate display of classical authors is deceptive. Often the learning {64} behind it was superficial; often the citations appear to have been dragged in as “window dressing...”<sup>202</sup>

John Adams, it seems, in 1774 had listed Plato as a proponent of equality and self-government. When he later read Plato’s *Republic*, he was more or less in agreement with Jefferson’s assessment of Plato’s *Dialogues* as “sophisms, futilities, and incomprehensibilities.”<sup>203</sup> What interested the Founders more than anything else in the classical age was Greek and Roman *history*. Ancient history furnished innumerable examples of what government should not be. The history of Greece was a lesson-book in the dangers of democracy, and the history of Rome was a lesson-book in usurpation and tyranny. As Bailyn writes, “The classics of the ancient world are everywhere in the literature of the Revolution, but they are everywhere illustrative, not determinative, of thought.”<sup>204</sup>

A more influential source, thinks Bailyn, is *Enlightenment thought*:

The ideas and writings of the leading secular thinkers of the European Enlightenment—reformers and social critics like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Beccaria as well as conservative analysts like Montesquieu—were quoted everywhere in the colonies, by everyone who claimed a broad awareness.<sup>205</sup>

But, Bailyn concludes, most of these citations and quotations are illustrative, not determinative, just as was the case with classical writers:

The citations are plentiful, but the knowledge they reflect, like that of the ancient classics, is at times superficial. Locke is cited often with precision on points of political theory, but at other times he is referred to in the most offhand way as if he could be relied on to support anything the writers happened to be arguing.<sup>206</sup>

Moreover, Bailyn points out, everyone, not merely the Patriots, cited the Enlightenment thinkers with authority. In a case mentioned above,

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202. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 24.

203. *Ibid.*

204. *Ibid.*, 26.

205. *Ibid.*, 27.

206. *Ibid.*, 28.

Peter Van Schaack even opposed independence on the basis of his reading of Locke. Russell Kirk has concluded that,

From studies of Americans' reading during that period, the answer seems to be that educated Americans often mentioned Locke on the eve of the Revolution, but seldom read his books at first hand.<sup>207</sup>

Even Jefferson, whose political philosophy is looked upon as Lockean, cited the English jurists Coke and Kames in his public papers and *Commonplace Book* more frequently than he cited Locke. Kirk finds the {65} fact that the Carolina settlers rejected "root and branch" Locke's "Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina," "a chastening thought for those historians who argue that John Locke's writings formed the American political mind..."<sup>208</sup>

One eighteenth-century philosopher who influenced the Founders was David Hume. Quoted only once in the eighty-five papers comprising the *Federalist*, his influence can be seen in a passage like this from Madison's pen:

The faculties of the mind itself have never yet been distinguished and defined with satisfactory precision by all the efforts of the most acute and metaphysical philosophers.... When we pass from the works of nature, in which all the delineations are perfectly accurate and appear to be otherwise only from the imperfection of the eye which surveys them, to the institutions of man, in which the obscurity arises as well from the object itself as from the organ by which it is contemplated, we must perceive the necessity of moderating still further our expectations and hopes from the efforts of human sagacity.<sup>209</sup>

Madison goes on in this vein for a few more pages—this passage is not unique. Hume's *History of England* was the most widely read history in the colonies, according to Kirk, and even though Hume provoked occasional hostility, his influence should not be overlooked. Hume's major accomplishment was, of course, to defeat the Rationalism of the eighteenth century at its own game: to use rational arguments to undermine rationalism. He acted as a counterbalancing force to the *philosophes* and the other rationalists of the period.

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207. Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order* (Open Court, 1974), 291.

208. *Ibid.*, 317.

209. *Federalist*, no. 37:227–28.

Another influence on the thought of the Founders that has already been mentioned is the *common law*. This source Bailyn finds “manifestly influential in shaping the awareness of the Revolutionary generation.”<sup>210</sup> But the common law, while certainly influential in the development of the ideas of human rights and constitutionalism, “was no science of what to do next.” Therefore, Bailyn concludes, “it did not in itself determine the kinds of conclusions men would draw in the crisis of the time.”<sup>211</sup>

Bailyn sees “a major source of ideas and attitudes of the Revolutionary generation [in the] political and social theories of New England Puritanism, and particularly ... [in] the ideas associated with covenant theology.”<sup>212</sup> This source, which Bailyn does not believe to be the major influence on the Founders’ political thought, nevertheless “offered a context for everyday events nothing less than cosmic in its dimensions,”<sup>213</sup> in short, a *weltanschauung*, a worldview. Bailyn, however, believes that “the ultimate origins of this distinctive ideological strain [the Founders’ philosophy] lay {66} in the radical social and political thought of the English Civil War and of the Commonwealth period...”<sup>214</sup> In short, during the ascendancy of Oliver Cromwell and the Roundheads. Who were the writers who shaped this thought? John Milton, James Harrington, Henry Neville, Algernon Sidney, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, Benjamin Hoadley, Francis Hutcheson, Philip Doddridge, and Isaac Watts, the hymn writer. But after Bailyn has made this list and stated his opinion that it was these thinkers—as distinct from the others I have mentioned above—that shaped and determined the political thought of the “Revolutionary generation,” he makes this remark: “On the main points of theory the eighteenth-century contributors to this tradition were not original. Borrowing heavily from more original thinkers, they were often, in their own time and after, dismissed as mere popularizers.” What Bailyn does find “original”

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210. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 31.

211. *Ibid.*

212. *Ibid.*, 32.

213. *Ibid.*

214. *Ibid.*, 34.

about these men—if indeed it is proper to call it original at all—is their pessimism:

They were the Cassandras of the age.... They insisted, at a time when government was felt to be less oppressive than it had been for two hundred years, that it was necessarily—by its very nature—hostile to human liberty and happiness.... [they] grounded their thought in pessimism concerning human nature and in the discouraging record of human weakness.<sup>215</sup>

We are, then, brought back to where we began this essay: the incorrigible nature of man. That view is a part of the *weltanschauung* of the New England Puritans—the covenant theology of Calvin. Perhaps, then, we ought to give further consideration to this influence on the thought of the Founders. Bailyn has called it “a major influence,” but not “the major influence.” Nearly all historians will agree that it was not the only influence. But if one traces out the thought of the Founders, the conclusion seems inescapable that the major influence was indeed the religion of the colonies and of the people.

Historian C. Gregg Singer has pointed out that,

very few of the radicals of 1776 found their way into the Philadelphia meeting [the Constitutional Convention]. Franklin was there, to be sure, but a subdued Franklin in contrast to the philosopher of 1776. Conspicuous for their absence were the most forceful of the liberal Deist leaders: Jefferson, Richard Henry Lee, and Thomas Paine. There is abundant evidence that evangelical Christianity was held in much higher respect by the majority in the Convention of 1787 than it had been in 1776 when the majority seemed to be Deists and Unitarians.<sup>216</sup>

Providence seems to have made radical thought—and it was not radical {67} by today’s standards—more influential when it was needed to break the bonds that bound the colonies and England together, and then forced it to recede while the less radical, less democratic ideas of the Christians came to the fore.

The influence of Puritanism, of Calvinism, ought not to be underrated, as it has tended to be, due to the biases of historians. In the words of Russell Kirk: “In the beginning America was Protestant...”<sup>217</sup>

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215. *Ibid.*, 46–48.

216. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (1969), 44.



In colonial America, everyone with the rudiments of schooling knew one book thoroughly: The Bible. And the Old Testament mattered as much as the New, for the American colonies were founded in a time of renewed Hebrew scholarship, and the Calvinistic character of Christian faith in early America emphasized the legacy of Israel....

John Calvin's Hebrew scholarship, and his expounding of the doctrine of sin and human depravity, impressed the Old Testament aspect of Christianity more strongly upon America than upon European states or other lands where Christians were in the majority.<sup>218</sup>

Kirk, who cannot be suspected of Calvinist sympathies, is not alone in his judgment of the influence of covenant theology. Bailyn writes that

In one sense this [Puritanism] was the most limited and parochial tradition that contributed in an important way to the writings of the Revolution, for it drew mainly from local sources and, whatever the extent of its newly acquired latitudinarianism, was yet restricted in its appeal to those who continued to understand the world, as the original Puritans had, in theological terms. But in another sense it contained the broadest ideas of all, since it offered a context for everyday events nothing less than cosmic in its dimensions. It carried on into the eighteenth century and into the minds of the Revolutionaries the idea, originally worked out in the sermons and tracts of the settlement period, that the colonization of British America had been an event designed by the hand of God to satisfy his ultimate aims. Reinvigorated in its historical meaning by newer works ... this influential strain of thought, found everywhere in the eighteenth-century colonies, stimulated confidence in the idea that America had a special place ... in the architecture of God's intent.<sup>219</sup>

John Adams, influenced by the theology of the Puritans, perceived the settling of the colonies in this way:

I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder—as the opening of a grand scene and design in providence for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.<sup>220</sup> {68}

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217. Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, 229.

218. *Ibid.*, 45–47.

219. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 32–33.

220. *Works of John Adams*, vol. 3, n. 452.

Adams' "admiration [for Puritanism] extended even to late sixteenth-century Dutch Calvinists," according to historian Richard Morris.<sup>221</sup>

Adams drew upon his Puritan heritage for not only his stout republicanism but his obsession with virtue.... The tradition of Puritan resistance to tyrannical government found expression in one of Adams's earliest writings, his "Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law," written and published in 1765.... To Adams, the Puritans had effected the Revolution, and the Patriots merely secured its benefits.<sup>222</sup>

Morris, of course, cannot be accused of any bias favoring the Puritans. We can only conclude from this evidence, and from evidence too voluminous to include in this essay, that the thought of the Founders was profoundly influenced by the Calvinism of the country, even though none of the major figures may have been a strictly orthodox Calvinist. The ideas that were held almost unanimously—the corruption of human nature, the distrust of men with political power, the necessity of virtue for a free society, the denial of sovereign governmental power, the belief that government ought to be limited, checked, and balanced, and the idea of the rule of law—are ideas that flow from the Calvinist background of the Founders and of the colonies. But, and this is important to note, the ideas were not held consistently, and they were adulterated by other influences. Despite their inconsistencies and weaknesses, however, the Founders acted upon ideas derived from a reformed and biblical political philosophy, and succeeded in establishing the nearest thing to a Christian constitutional republic that the modern world has ever seen. We risk misinterpreting and/or rejecting their ideas at our peril.

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221. Richard B. Morris, *Seven Who Shaped Our Destiny* (New York, 1973), 77.

222. *Ibid.*, 78–80.

# THE MYTH OF AN AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

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*Rousas John Rushdoony*

The myth of an American Enlightenment persists among scholars in spite of the lack of any substantial evidence for it. A few scholars have remarked on the scarcity of any evidence for an American Enlightenment, but the idea persists because it meets a theological need on the part of humanistic man. The great event in the history of the United States must somehow be tied in with the major Western motif of man's growing assertion of his autonomous reason as the ultimate judge and arbiter of reality.

Superficially, some figures in American history seem to lend credence to the idea of an American Enlightenment, notably Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Because of the particular importance of Franklin to this thesis, little is made of two facts: *first*, the basic influence in the life and thought of Franklin, however altered in its framework, was Cotton Mather's *Essays To Do Good*. Franklin never entirely lost the context of Calvinism and, in his later life, was prone to talk piously, albeit not as a Christian, of a personal and sovereign God whose resemblance to the Puritan concept was marked. *Second*, there is an extensive blackout on the facts of Franklin's life, his frequent unpopularity, the fact that he and Jefferson were used as diplomats because most American statesmen were too straitlaced to be acceptable in the courts of Europe. Moreover, much is revealed about American historiography by the fact that Professor Cecil B. Currey's study *Code Number 72: Ben Franklin—Patriot or Spy?* (1972) has been so extensively ignored and that scholars continue to write as though Currey's damning evidence had never existed. The attitude towards Franklin was naively manifested in the title of a biography by Phillips Russell, *Benjamin Franklin: The First Civilized American* (1962), a book which went through many reprintings in two years, eight between October, 1926, and December 1927. The first civilized American? The audacity of that

title is amazing but revealing. Why indeed was Franklin the first civilized American? Why were so many men of greater education, learning, culture, and achievement before and during Franklin's day, ruled out as implicitly uncivilized? The answer is that only in Franklin did they find their first American of any real ability who was not an orthodox Christian.

Franklin and Jefferson do not make an Enlightenment. The Enlightenment influence on them is clear, but they are still not men of the Enlightenment. The Puritan framework of their lives is still too apparent in their {70} thought. (It should be remembered that, in Jefferson's day, New Jersey and Virginia were manifesting strong evidences of the influence of Calvinism. Puritanism was moving South.) Enlightenment writings were known to Americans; in arguing their cases for independence, American thinkers freely resorted to the thinkers who carried weight with Europeans, but this did not mean an acceptance of their framework. American thinking was still essentially Christian, and its context was more theocentric than humanistic.

However, it cannot be denied that there was a change in American thought, notably in New England, where Puritanism had declined even as it had flourished elsewhere. Even in New England, where Boston preachers proclaimed, if so strong a word can be used, a smooth gospel alien to the Puritan spirit, there were men like Isaac Backus to fire the old Puritan spirit into new, Baptist channels, and Edwardians to assert the sovereignty of God in a manner soon to command a large portion of the churches.

But, to return to the change, what was its nature? Was it indeed a rise in America of a facet or expression of the European Enlightenment? The answer is, clearly, that nothing like the European *philosophes* existed in America. Again, not even Deism was a significant factor, before or after the War of Independence, in America. Deism was savagely attacked by American churchmen, and it always had the flavor of foreignness, of something alien and hostile. The language of Europe and America had as its common feature an emphasis on calm, rational discourse, but we must not confuse this with rationalism. In America, the linguistics of rationality moved to other purposes.

The American context was theological, and the change was not from Puritanism to the Enlightenment but rather from a theocratic Puritan-

ism to a theological Puritanism on the one hand and a growing infiltration of Arminianism on the other. It must be granted and, in fact, insisted that the Enlightenment and Arminianism are both aspects of the history of humanism. However, it must be held, with equal insistence, that they are not the same. The Enlightenment, as Peter Gay has made clear, was in its essence anti-Christian and anti-church. Arminianism is a theological movement within the church which manifests itself in everyday life as an emphasis on man's experience as against God's sovereignty. The two cannot be confused.

It has been a failure in American historiography that it long neglected the determinative forces of Puritanism and Arminianism in American history. In 1975, an American professor manifested the main spirit of American intellectuals when on retirement, he declared that, because of its Puritan hangover, the United States was no place "for a civilized man" (echoes of Phillips Russell on Franklin!) and left for England. (He was {71} soon to write home a tale of woe, because England's 26 percent inflation was wiping out his savings and pension and making even his return impossible!)

The American scholar, who up to World War I looked heavily to European universities for his degrees and his academic credentials, has taken Europe's tradition as his own and has sought to read that tradition into American history. However, the roots of American history are theological, and its essential waywardness must be read in terms of Arminianism, not in terms of the Enlightenment or its subsequent developments. It is significant that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, harking back to a European tradition as old as Plato, gathered together scholars to function as a "brain trust." Few things gained him more hostilities than this, and the group was soon disbanded. When President John F. Kennedy brought some scholars to Washington, their role as a "brain trust" was deemphasized except among American university professors. In contrast, the use, by Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, of the Arminian revivalist Billy Graham as a standby blessing gained enormous approval except from academic circles in the main. The "brain trust" was alien, while Billy Graham was in the mainstream of the American context.

In 1976 as in 1776, the basic orientation of most Americans is Christian. The majority of Americans are church members. While many of

these churches are modernistic, modernism is also a form of Arminian theology. Arminian fundamentalists number easily forty-five to fifty-five million people, one out of four in the United States. In 1776, the percentage of church membership was very low, although church attendance was high, because membership requirements were more restrictive. The basic context of life was essentially Puritan, in the theological rather than the political sense.

Timothy Dwight, in fact, held that European ideas and morals were alien and unreal to most Americans until introduced by foreign troops in the French and Indian War, which shortly preceded the War of Independence.

An universal veneration for the sabbath, a sacred respect for government, an undoubting belief in Divine revelation, and an unconditional acknowledgement and performance of the common social duties, constituted every where a prominent character. I have said that the exceptions were not material. It is not intended that the whole number was inconsiderable; nor that vice was not found in various, and sometimes very painful degrees. Still, vicious men constituted a very small part of the society; were insignificant in their character; and, independently of the power of example, had little or no influence on the community at large. They were objects of odium and contempt, of censures and punishment; not the elements of a party, nor the fire-brands of turmoil and confusion [Timothy Dwight, "On the State of Religion in New England" (from *President Dwight's Travels*), in *New Evangelical Magazine and Theological Review* 9 (March 1823) 65].

Dwight was ready to blame America's subsequent ills on the Enlightenment {72} and the French Revolution. As a scholar, Dwight looked to the world of dominant ideas for his answers and concluded that Europe's unbelief had corrupted America's faith. However, even as Dwight was writing, Arminian revivalism was emerging to command the American scene. The context of American life had not materially changed; it remained theological rather than philosophical in its determination, i.e., it was a faith rather than a series of abstract ideas which governed men.

Moreover, an important factor in the decline of Puritanism has been neglected. British intelligence saw the War of Independence as racial and theological: it was called a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian rebellion, and with good reason. It was the nexus of the Puritan-Calvinist faith with

the Scotch-Irish hostility to England which dominated the resistance and provided its troops. As a result, it was the Puritan-Calvinist churches which suffered most: their pastors were more likely to be in the army or the chaplaincy, and the British burned their churches readily and happily. These churches never recovered their prominent role in American life.

The theological context of American history is very clearly seen in the conflict of 1860–1865. President Lincoln, not a Christian, saw the struggle in theological terms; his addresses have overtones of Puritan theocentricity and Arminian experientialism and anthropocentricity. His appeal is precisely this combination: he is a religious man and yet a politician; he combines the Puritan tradition with an Arminian orientation, and Billy Graham looks less “holy” than does Lincoln. No president approached more closely the European power politics and balance of powers strategy than did Nixon, and with disastrous consequences. American politics have an insistent moral and religious orientation, although, because of Arminianism, this means the pretensions of man rather than the sovereignty of God.

The Enlightenment, it must be recognized, was a European fact, not an American event. South Africa, a European outpost founded at about the same time as New York City, also escaped the Enlightenment and has had an independent course of development.

True, Enlightenment thinkers were read and did influence many Americans, just as Europe was in turn influenced by American thought. But the two traditions, while far from hermetically sealed from one another, and having many points in common, are still different. American intellectuals have only alienated themselves from most Americans by adopting an alien heritage. American theological life too has had a different course. Its Calvinism has been different from that of Europe, and its churches have all gone through changes by virtue of their transplanting to an American context. Their European counterparts did not have vestrymen, elders, or the like.

Theologically, the United States has been a battleground between Calvinism {73} and Arminianism. The loser has, however, set the framework of the country, so that even Arminianism is today judged by its ability (or, more accurately, inability) to be a world and life faith which orders every area of life. The Enlightenment, as an essentially

aristocratic faith for a very limited elite, could not gain roots in a land which was so saturated with a faith of the unity of all things under God. The scholars who promote the myth of an American Enlightenment also hold to another myth, i.e., that the War of Independence was a democratic revolution. They cannot have it both ways: a temper of the times and a movement which is both elitist and equalitarian at one and the same time. Neither can they ignore without serious misunderstanding the essentially theological framework of the American mind in 1776. Alan Heimert has given us eloquent evidence of the persistence of that theological influence well into the nineteenth century.

The myth of an American Enlightenment is an example of wishful thinking by humanistic scholars. The fact that an idea is held by scholars does not make it scholarly. The present problem of the United States is the moral bankruptcy of antinomian Arminianism, which is another problem entirely from that which confronts continental Europe.



# 1776: REVOLUTION OR WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE?

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*J. Murray Murdoch*

One concomitant of the United States bicentennial has been the sudden wave of interest in American history that has enveloped the nation. People at every level of society have suddenly become sensitized to the birth of their nation. Scholars have produced a plethora of monographic material related to the events surrounding 1776, while publishers have reprinted numerous long-forgotten volumes in an eager attempt to meet the public's insatiable demand for information.

But in the midst of the excitement, the Christian is often perplexed by a nagging question: can a Christian legitimately celebrate a “revolution” in light of Romans 13? The dictionary defines revolution as “a sudden, radical, or complete change; a fundamental change in political organization, especially the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed.” In the context of this definition, what is the proper attitude of the Christian to the events of two hundred years ago? By celebrating the bicentennial, are conservative theologians contributing to the radical tradition in America? What about the black revolution or the campus revolution of recent years—were these fostered by a radical tradition ingrained in America's national history at its inception?

The purpose of this essay is not to provide *the* Christian response to these questions, but rather to establish a historical frame of reference out of which individuals may formulate their own response. The theological issues posed by an exegesis of Romans 13 can be answered only when there is a clear understanding of what actually occurred in eighteenth-century America. And the key to understanding what transpired is to be found in answering a fundamental question: was what occurred in America in 1776 really a revolution?

Charles M. Andrews concluded his *Colonial Background of the American Revolution*, written over a half century ago, with this pene-

trating thought: “A nation’s attitude toward its own history is like a window into its own soul, and the men and women of such a nation cannot be expected to meet the great obligations of the present if they refuse to exhibit honesty, charity, open-mindedness, and a free and growing intelligence toward the past that has made them what they are.”<sup>223</sup> Andrew’s admonition is well {75} taken, but difficult to effectuate. Historians operate out of a cultural *milieu* which often causes them to read the value judgments of the present into the past. But the real danger comes when these same historians boast of their objective and unbiased approach. Only when he recognizes the limitations of his preconceptions and presuppositions can the historian be effective.

The facts of history are not neutral. Facts always pass through the filter of human interpretation, and in the process may be distorted to such an extent that they are no longer facts. In effect, they become myths that pervert the past. “To accept myth is to reject history, and to make myths the premise in terms of which history is judged is to deny any validity to history.”<sup>224</sup>

Unfortunately, many of the myths are created by historians. For example, George Bancroft, an exuberant American patriot, portrayed the independence movement as a duel between good (America) and evil (England).<sup>225</sup> Such a stilted approach obviously lacked balance, and thus created myth. The chauvinism of Bancroft and other nationalist writers was counterbalanced by the imperial school of historiography which frequently viewed the Americans as irresponsible and ungrateful to the empire that had cared for them so faithfully.<sup>226</sup>

In analyzing this same period, historians of the internal revolution school, describing the Revolution as a conflict between the haves and have nots, structured an economic interpretation of American history.

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223. Charles M. Andrews, *Colonial Background of the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1924), 220.

224. Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969), 111.

225. George Bancroft, *A History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1834–1875).

226. This position is articulated by George Lewis Beer in his volume, *British Colonial Policy, 1754–1763* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), and by Lawrence Henry Gibson in *The Coming of the Revolution, 1763–1775* (New York: Harper, 1954).

“By its light, politics in America, from the very beginning, could be seen to have been a dialectical process in which an aristocracy of wealth and power struggled with the People, who, ordinarily ill-organized and inarticulate, rose upon provocation armed with powerful institutional and ideological weapons, to reform a periodically corrupt and oppressive polity.”<sup>227</sup> Accordingly, the American Revolution was fought, in Carl Becker’s well-worn phrase, not over “home rule” but “who would rule at home”; the Articles of Confederation became the embodiment of the radical philosophy in constitutional form; and the Constitution of 1787 became a conservative counterrevolution leading to the reestablishment of conservative political control.<sup>228</sup> {76}

In the 1950s, Beard’s volume, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, became the focal point of an attack by Robert Brown and Forrest McDonald which opened the door for a much-needed revision.<sup>229</sup> Brown also published volumes on Massachusetts and Virginia that were of particular significance to the concept of American democracy. In the first work he contended that a middle-class democracy existed in Massachusetts throughout the eighteenth century, and that the revolution was a conservative movement which was actually fought to preserve, not create, democracy. In the subsequent volume, Brown and his wife, Katherine, argued along much the same lines for Virginia.<sup>230</sup>

The Brown thesis has been challenged on several fronts. Richard Buel admits Brown’s work demonstrated a broad franchise, but claims

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227. Bernard Bailyn, “Political Experience and Enlightenment Ideas in Eighteenth-Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 67 (January 1962):341. Bailyn’s volumes, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967) and *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), also offer significant information on this subject.

228. Carl Becker, *A History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960). Originally published in 1909. Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959). Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913).

229. Robert E. Brown, *Charles Beard and the Constitution: A Critical Analysis of “An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956). Forrest McDonald, *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

that “the complex model of assumptions about the people’s power with which Americans entered the imperial crisis bore little relation to American democracy, as it is popularly conceived today.”<sup>231</sup> Analyzing Boston by studying tax lists from 1687 to 1771, James Henretta concluded that throughout the period there had been a “growing segmentation of the community,” and “society had become more stratified and unequal.”<sup>232</sup> Kenneth Lockridge describes eighteenth-century New England as an “overcrowded” region that was beginning to resemble the “old world” with “an increasingly wide and articulated social hierarchy” and with increasing numbers of poor.<sup>233</sup> {77}

In spite of this discussion, however, as R. R. Palmer has indicated, at the time of her Revolution, America was unique: “Despite the war of words, the domestic conflicts were for most people not deeply bitter. Between social classes there was less fear and hostility than in Europe,

230. Robert E. Brown, *Middle Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691–1780* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1955). Robert E. and B. Katherine Brown, *Virginia, 1705–1786: Democracy or Aristocracy?* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1964). See also Charles Grant, *Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town of Kent* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), and Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965). Both Grant and Main give qualified support to the “middle class” concept. But Grant argued that both economic and social stratification developed between 1777 and 1796, while Main contended that the same trend began developing before the Revolution.

231. Richard Buel Jr., “Democracy and the American Revolution: A Frame of Reference,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 21 (April 1964):189.

232. James A. Henretta, “Economic Development and Social Structure in Colonial Boston,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 22 (January 1965):42.

233. Kenneth Lockridge, “Land, Population, and the Evolution of New England Society, 1630–1790,” *Past and Present* 39 (October 1966): 574. See also James T. Lemon and Gary B. Nash, “The Distribution of Wealth in Eighteenth-Century America: A Century of Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1693–1802.” This article appeared originally in the *Journal of Social History* and was reprinted in *Class and Society in Early America*, ed. Gary B. Nash (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1970). Lemon and Nash agree with Lockridge that there was increasing stratification in pre-Revolutionary America, but they disagree with his feeling that the Revolution reversed this trend. See also Gary B. Nash, “Framing Government in Pennsylvania: Ideas in Conflict with Reality,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 23 (April 1966):183–209.

less deference, and less contempt. ‘Aristocrats’ in America had less to lose, and ‘democrats’ had less to complain against.”<sup>234</sup>

The major impact of the economic determinist school of historiography was to accustom Americans to thinking in terms of the Revolution as a radical movement. With the emphasis thus upon the “revolutionary” aspect of 1776, there was a corresponding deemphasis of the concept of a War for Independence. This trend has been pushed still further with the emergence of the “new left” school of historiography. While this term defies precise definition, it denotes “a group of various ‘left’ views—whether they be Marxist, neo-Beardian, radical, or left-liberal.”<sup>235</sup> The new-left writings relating to the period of the War for Independence have “been stimulated by two upheavals in history; the American civil rights movement which suggested a fresh new look at the importance of slavery in the Revolutionary era; and the world wide colonial independence movement, which seem to offer a new model for conceptualizing the Revolution and its relation to the Civil War.”<sup>236</sup>

In this context, Staughton Lynd argues that “the slave, though he spoke few lines, should be moved front and center. If as Beard said there was a ‘large propertyless mass’ which the Constitution ‘excluded at the outset,’ the one fifth of the population in hereditary bondage better deserves that description than any group of whites for few whites who began life without property failed to acquire it.”<sup>237</sup> In this same vein, Jesse Lemisch contends that “this sympathy for the powerless brings us closer to objectivity; in practice, it leads the historian to describe past societies as they appeared from the bottom rather than the top. More from the point of view of the inarticulate than of the articulate.”<sup>238</sup>

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234. R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Struggle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 510.

235. Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York: Random House Inc., 1967), x. Bernstein brings together a number of new-left writers in this volume. (Hereinafter referred to as *Essays*).

236. Staughton Lynd, “Beyond Beard,” *Essays*, 49.

237. *Ibid.*, 58.

238. Jesse Lemisch, “The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up,” *Essays*, 6.

Both Lynd and Lemisch are assuming that 1776 involved a revolution. Thus, Lemisch seeks to analyze that revolution from the “bottom” through {78} the “inarticulate,” while Lynd looks to the 20 percent of the population that was held in bondage and finds the long-sought “propertyless mass.” Both writers are poured into a neo-Beardian mold, out of which they seek to derive an interpretation consonant with economic determinism. But the slave was totally incapable, because of his condition in bondage, of having a significant impact upon the conflict. The limitations of his enslavement were so great that he was unable to function outside them. The abuses of the slave system, which many of the new-left writers themselves emphasize, precluded the possibility of the black man even having an awareness of the issues at hand. Independence did not offer him the potential of freedom. The notion that he hoped things might improve through independence is totally indemonstrable. There is no documentary evidence to sustain it. By the same token, the inarticulate certainly had feelings of their own, but their inability effectively to communicate those feelings precluded the possibility of their molding public opinion. Thus, while the slave and the inarticulate may provide interesting insights on the thoughts of a few, they contribute little to the overall understanding of the key issues.

One of the favorite targets of the new left is Robert Brown. They find his concept of a middle-class democracy most abhorrent, in spite of the fact that one of their own (Staughton Lynd) admits that “few whites who began life without property failed to acquire it.” Rejecting the concept of “middle-class democracy,” they substitute a continuing and more sharply defined demarcation between a colonial aristocracy, and the “poor masses.” The colonial period exacerbates this trend until finally the aristocracy must be overthrown by the masses, and thus a revolution of the proletariat takes place. In his desire to perpetuate a continuing series of struggles between the “haves” and the “have nots,” Jesse Lemisch goes so far as to say that “throughout America property qualifications excluded more and more people from voting until a ‘Jacksonian revolution’ was necessary to overthrow what had become a very limited middle class ‘democracy’ indeed.”<sup>239</sup> An examination of the manner in which suffrage was broadened in the early years of the

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239. *Ibid.*, 8.

nineteenth century renders this statement absurd. Rather than property qualifications proscribing suffrage, as Lemisch contends, state after state was broadening suffrage through the elimination of land requirements. Property qualifications for voting were eliminated in New Jersey as early as 1807, followed by Maryland (1810), Connecticut (1818), Maine (1820), Massachusetts (1821), and New York (1821). Meanwhile, new states such as Indiana (1816), Illinois (1818), and Alabama (1819) extended voting privileges to all adult white males. During the same period there was an increase in the number of elective offices. {79} Further, by 1828, the time of the so-called “Jackson revolution,” presidential electors were chosen by the people in twenty-two of the twenty-four states; only South Carolina and Delaware continued to select electors through the state legislature.<sup>240</sup>

The economic determinist writers, whether in the traditional progressive mold of Beard and Becker, or in the new-left pattern of Lemisch and Lynd, constantly refer to the events of 1776 as a “revolution.” Hence, Jeremy Rifkin, co-director of the People’s Bicentennial Commission in Washington, D C, describes the official Government Bicentennial as “very shallow” and urges Americans to “recommit themselves to the revolutionary principles we started off with 200 years ago.”<sup>241</sup> He then calls for a “new social force” in America that “will challenge unwarranted concentrations of financial and political power and restore the dignity of the individual.”<sup>242</sup>

But Rifkin is generalizing on the basis of a neo-Marxian view of American history that may certainly be challenged. While general usage has readily accepted the phrase “American Revolution,” it is very possible that the term itself contributes to the misunderstanding of the period. It would be much more accurate to describe the events of these years as a War for Independence in which the colonists sought the preservation of their government and their way of life.

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240. Richard B. Morris, ed., *Encyclopedia of American History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 160, 165–66, 186, 331.

241. “Growing Controversy Over the Bicentennial: Two Views,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 24, 1975, 35.

242. *Ibid.*

Keep in mind that in the century and a half prior to the conflict, the colonies passed through a significant political transition. Each colony moved from a feeble localized government to a strong representative government. In this process, a new breed of political “leadership” evolved. These leaders gradually developed a colonial orientation as opposed to a British orientation as a whole range of domestic issues emerged as focal points for their activities.

During this same period, the mother country was also undergoing a marked political transition. The Glorious Revolution (1689–90) found Parliament gaining power in England. While drawing power from the king in terms of political control in England, Parliament assumed that this included the right to govern the colonial empire. Parliament’s reasoning was simple: the king had controlled the colonies; royal power had to a large extent become Parliament’s responsibility; therefore Parliament had the right to control the colonies. However, following the British victory in the Great War for Empire in 1763, the parliamentary syllogism was challenged by the colonists in America.

Thus a basic disagreement between the colonies and the mother country {80} clearly emerged as a result of their separate historical movements. The discord centered around the basic question: *who has the power?* There were many other problems of great importance. Mutual ignorance concerning actual circumstances was rampant on both sides of the Atlantic. The numerous misunderstandings exacerbated the variety of economic, social, and intellectual problems which were extant. Neither the British nor the Americans seemed capable of seeing reality. Both had reached a point of maturity where adjustments in their relationship were imperative and there was clearly a failure to make these adjustments. Both sides continued to operate out of the context of their earlier attitudinal patterns. But the documents of the era overwhelmingly demonstrate that the basic problem between the colonies and the mother country involved *a constitutional-political struggle over the spheres of power.*

While the British posture was simply that Parliament had control of the entire empire, the colonial position was more complex. The colonists referred back to the original *charters* that had established the various colonies. They pointed out that these charters guaranteed them all of the rights of Englishmen. This appeal to the original charters was a



part of virtually all the colonial papers written in protest from the time of the Stamp Act until the Declaration of Independence.

The colonists reminded the mother country that the original settlers in America brought with them all of the *rights of Englishmen*. As the Virginia Resolves put it, “Resolved, that the first adventurers and settlers of this His Majesty’s Colony and Dominion of Virginia brought with them, and transmitted to their posterity, and all other His Majesty’s subjects since inhabiting in this His Majesty’s said Colony, all the liberties, privileges, franchises, and immunities, that have at any time been held, enjoyed, and possessed, by the people of Great Britain.”<sup>243</sup> They further pointed out that the legitimacy and validity of these claims to the rights of Englishmen were established by royal decree in their charters: “Resolved, that by two royal charters, granted by King James the First, the colonists aforesaid are declared entitled to all liberties, privileges, and immunities of denizens and natural subjects, to all intents and purposes, as if they had been abiding and born within the realm of England.”<sup>244</sup>

When the Stamp Act Congress convened, the delegates reiterated the theme of the Virginia Resolves. As they prepared the official Resolutions, their initial arguments referred to their traditional rights. They began by contending that “His Majesty’s subjects in these colonies owe the same {81} allegiance to the Crown of Great Britain that is owing from his subjects born within the realm.”<sup>245</sup> Thus, the colonists were willing to accept the responsibilities of being subjects of the crown. Having said that, however, they went on to remind the mother country “that His Majesty’s liege subjects in these colonies are intitled [*sic*] to all the inherent rights and liberties of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great Britain.”<sup>246</sup> While accepting the responsibilities of

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243. Virginia, *Resolves on the Stamp Act*, May 30, 1765. This document and most others quoted in this essay are taken from Samuel E. Morison, ed., *Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution, 1764–1788* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923). Future documents cited may be found in this collection unless otherwise noted.

244. *Ibid.*

245. American Colonies, *Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress*, October 19, 1765.

246. *Ibid.*

citizenship, they sought the “rights and liberties” that were traditionally a concomitant of that citizenship.

In 1774, almost a decade later, the colonists were still referring to their rights under the original charters. The First Continental Congress, meeting in 1774 to decide a course of action on the Intolerable Acts, again drew attention to the traditional rights guaranteed the colonists by the original compacts and by nature of their birth. They reminded their fellow subjects in England that their “ancestors, who first settled the colonies, were at the time of their emigration from the mother country, entitled to all the rights, liberties, and immunities of free and natural-born subjects within the realm of England.”<sup>247</sup> Further, they contended “that by such emigration they by no means forfeited, surrendered, or lost any of those rights, but that they were, and their descendants now are entitled to the exercise and enjoyment of all such of them, as their local and other circumstances enable them to exercise and enjoy.”<sup>248</sup>

By this time, the colonists had been arguing for their traditional rights as Englishmen for several years. As they appealed again and again to the “principles of the English Constitution, and the several charters or compacts”<sup>249</sup> of the various colonies, they continually experienced the frustration of rejection. The British turned a deaf ear to their pleas and continued to operate within their own frame of reference. Consequently, the colonists began to introduce a new theme which revolved around an appeal to a cause even higher than constitutional rights or charter rights. This theme was based on *an appeal to God or nature*. The First Continental Congress refers to the “immutable laws of nature.”<sup>250</sup> The Second Continental Congress, while giving their reasons for taking up arms “in defense of the freedom that is our birthright and which we ever enjoy till the late violations of it,” referred to “the supreme and impartial judge and ruler of the universe.”<sup>251</sup> {82}

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247. First Continental Congress, *Declarations and Resolves of the First Continental Congress*, October 14, 1774. Hereafter *Declarations*.

248. *Ibid.*

249. *Ibid.*

250. *Ibid.*

When arms were originally raised in 1775 against the mother country, the colonists did not intend independence. They tried to assure the homeland of this by saying, “lest this declaration should disquiet the minds of our friends and fellow-subjects in any part of the Empire, we assure them that we mean not to dissolve that union which has so long and happily subsisted between us, and which we sincerely wish to see restored.”<sup>252</sup> Their only purpose in taking up arms was to dispose their “adversaries to reconciliation on reasonable terms, and thereby to relieve the Empire from the calamities of civil war.”<sup>253</sup>

However, as time passed and the military conflict continued, the colonists began to move toward separation. By the spring of 1776 the independence movement was gaining momentum. In April, John Adams wrote James Warren: “... if you are so unanimous in the measure of independency, and wish for a declaration of it, now is the proper time to instruct your delegates to that effect. It would have been productive of jealousies perhaps, and animosities, a few months ago; but would have a contrary tendency now. The Colonies are all at this moment turning their eyes that way.”<sup>254</sup>

When the Declaration of Independence was drafted, it was naturally devoid of any appeal to constitutional rights, charter rights, or the rights of Englishmen. Here the appeal was based entirely on *higher laws*: “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” It was declared to be a “self-evident” truth that “all men are created equal.” Further, “they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”<sup>255</sup> Failing to gain their duly constituted rights as Englishmen, the colonists shifted their appeal as a last resort to the divine rights insured by Nature’s God.<sup>256</sup>

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251. Second Continental Congress, *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*, July 6, 1775.

252. *Ibid.*

253. *Ibid.*

254. John Adams to James Warren, Philadelphia, April 22, 1776.

255. Continental Congress, *The Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776.

256. These references to God in *The Declaration of Independence* should not be construed as evidence that the Founding Fathers were orthodox Christian statesmen. To the contrary, the Declaration demonstrates the degree to which the authors were influenced by Deism.

Having thus briefly summarized the foundation upon which the Americans built their argument, it is now necessary to focus attention on the basic issue of disagreement between the colonists and the mother country. Here again, historians have created considerable confusion. Some have argued that the issue was originally internal taxation, subsequently external taxation, and ultimately no taxation.<sup>257</sup> This, however, leads us away {83} from the key issue. The main point in the American argument was that *the colonial legislatures should have control in the colonies*, particularly in matters involving taxation and domestic polity.

The enunciation of the American position and the British response to that position clearly indicate that throughout this entire period neither side changed its basic posture. The colonists consistently argued that their representatives in the legislative assemblies had the right to control colonial domestic policy, particularly in the realm of taxation. The British position was consistently that Parliament had the right to make these decisions—to rule, and particularly to levy taxes—throughout the empire. From the time of the Stamp Act to the Declaration of Independence, neither the American nor the British position altered significantly.

On March 22, 1765, when Parliament issued the *Stamp Act*, it marked the first time a direct tax had ever been levied on colonial America. The act was designed to raise money to support military forces in America. The colonists wanted neither the army nor the tax. Further, they denied vociferously the authority of Parliament to levy such a tax. Among the first to react were the people of Virginia. Virginians had always been touchy about the matter of taxation. As early as 1624, when the House of Burgesses was left in a state of limbo when the

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257. The idea that the colonial position on taxation shifted through the pre-war years was presented by Carl Becker in *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), and by Clinton Rossiter in *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953). This position was capably refuted by Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crises: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1953). This volume demonstrates that the basic colonial position never shifted from internal to external taxation. Their argument was directed against *any* taxation by Parliament.

Virginia Company's charter was rescinded by the crown, the colonists had been sensitive on this subject. The last gathering of the Burgesses denied the royal governor the right to "lay taxes or impositions" upon Virginians without the authorization of the general assembly. Thus, the first statement of the "no taxation without representation" idea was conceived in Virginia before Massachusetts Bay had been settled. In 1629, when Charles I named Sir John Harvey governor of the Virginia colony, Harvey impressed upon Charles the need for reconvening the legislative assembly, which had not met since 1624. At that time, England was on the verge of war with France, and King Charles was in desperate need of money. Consequently, he agreed to allow the assembly to reconvene in return for a monopoly of the valuable tobacco exports. In 1639, Charles issued a decree formalizing this earlier commitment and guaranteeing that the Virginia legislature would meet annually. In essence, King Charles I sold the birthright of representative government in America, and his "mess of pottage" was the tobacco monopoly.

Thus, when Parliament sought in 1765 to impose a direct tax, the Virginians quickly responded. They reminded the king "that the taxation of the people by themselves, or by persons chosen by themselves to represent them, who can only know what taxes the people are able to bear, or the {84} easiest method of raising them, and must be affected by every tax laid on the people, is the only security against a burthen-some taxation."<sup>258</sup> They went on to point out that this was the "distinguishing characteristic [*sic*] of British freedom without which the ancient constitution cannot exist," and reminded the king "that His Majesty's liege people of this his most ancient and loyal Colony" had "without interruption enjoyed the inestimable right of being governed by such laws."<sup>259</sup>

On June 6, the Massachusetts Assembly called for an intercolonial caucus to force the repeal of the Stamp Act. Each colonial legislature received a circular calling for a congress to be convened in New York City in October of 1765. When the delegates gathered, representatives from nine of the thirteen colonies were present. These representatives

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258. Virginia, *Resolves on the Stamp Act*, May 30, 1765.

259. *Ibid.*

issued a series of resolutions designed to remind the king of their traditional rights. They argued that it was “inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted right of Englishmen, that no taxes be imposed on them but with their own consent given personally or by their representatives.”<sup>260</sup> They were unwilling to accept Parliament’s control over them, since “the people of these colonies are not, and from their local circumstances cannot be, represented in the House of Commons in Great Britain.”<sup>261</sup> They went on to point out that “the only representatives of the people of these colonies are persons chosen therein by themselves, and that no taxes ever have been, or can be constitutionally imposed on them, but by their respective legislatures.”<sup>262</sup> In their minds, the Stamp Act was not merely an ill-advised exercise of legitimate control. Instead, it was an extension of British control in an unconstitutional manner.

Eventually the Stamp Act was repealed because it was not producing the desired revenue. But at the same time that they removed the Stamp Act, Parliament issued a *Declaratory Act* which verified their belief that the king and Parliament had “full power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonists ... in all cases whatsoever.”<sup>263</sup> In the aura of satisfaction surrounding their apparent victory over the Stamp Act, the colonists failed to recognize that the British position had not been altered one iota.

This fact became apparent with the imposition of the Townshend Duties on June 29, 1767. These acts placed import duties on various commodities. {85} In this instance, the colonial reaction was not so strong because not everyone was affected in a direct manner, and many did not understand the issues. However, the colonists resisted these acts and eventually all but the *duty on tea* were repealed on April 12, 1770. A complete repeal of the duties was avoided because Lord Fred-

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260. American Colonies, *Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress*, October 19, 1765.

261. *Ibid.*

262. *Ibid.*

263. British Parliament, *An Act for the Better Securing the Dependency of His Majesty’s Dominions in America upon the Crown and Parliament of Great Britain* (generally referred to as *The Declaratory Act*), March 18, 1766. This document is found in Henry Steele Commager, ed., *Documents of American History*, 8th ed. (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1968), 60–61.

erick North, who had become head of government in January of 1770, feared that to do so would be interpreted as a sign of weakness. He even was willing to promise that no further taxes would be levied by his government in his desire to conciliate the colonists. But he was determined, through the tax on tea, to demonstrate that the mother country maintained this sphere of power. Thus, the tea tax struck to the very heart of the constitutional-political problem. It was an illustration of the validity of the Declaratory Act in the mind of both the British and the Americans.

In 1773, when it appeared that the Tea Act would be used to provide a monopoly for the East India Company, a group of colonists, determined to draw the line, dumped a shipment of tea into Boston harbor. This destruction of property was viewed by the British with horror. Parliament's angry response took the form of a series of coercive acts which included: the Boston Port Bill, which in effect closed the Boston harbor; the Administration of Justice Act, which protected British officials from major suits in unfriendly colonial courts; and the Massachusetts Government Act, which for all practical purposes annulled the charter of Massachusetts Bay and eliminated the right of self-government in the colony. These acts, along with the Quebec Act and the Quartering Act, were referred to by the colonists as the *Intolerable Acts*.

The First Continental Congress convened in the city of Philadelphia on September 5, 1774, to determine the official colonial position on the Intolerable Acts. In a protracted session lasting until almost the end of October, the delegates voted to table Galloway's plan of union and endorse the Suffolk County (Massachusetts) Resolves. Out of these were drafted the Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress, which were adopted on October 14, 1774. In the opening sentence the representatives made their major complaint very clear:

Whereas, since the close of the last war, the British Parliament, claiming their power, of right, to bind the people of America by statutes in all cases whatsoever, hath, in some acts, expressly imposed taxes on them, and in others, under various pretences, but in fact for the purpose of raising a revenue, hath imposed rates and duties payable in these colonies, established a board of commissioners with unconstitutional powers, and extended the jurisdiction of courts of admiralty, not only for collecting the said duties, but for the trial of causes merely arising within the body of a county.<sup>264</sup> {86}

This principle of parliamentary control was totally unacceptable to the colonials. Indeed, they contended “that the foundation of English liberty, and of all free government, is a right in the people to participate in their legislative council.”<sup>265</sup>

It was obvious to the Americans that they had no representation in Parliament. The concept of “virtual representation” was useless and degrading as far as they were concerned. The notion of a colonial legislature which was an inferior part of Parliament had proven unacceptable in their earlier consideration of Galloway’s plan.<sup>266</sup> In colonial opinion, it was “indispensably necessary to good government, and rendered essential by the English Constitution, that the constituent branches of the legislature be independent of each other.”<sup>267</sup>

Many in America found it incredible that Parliament would presume to seek such control. James Wilson inquired into the source of this “uncontrolled authority” which was being assumed by the House of Commons. He asked: “Have they a natural right to make laws, by which we may be deprived of our properties, of our liberties, of our lives? By what title do they claim to be our masters? What act of ours has rendered us subject to those, to whom we were formerly equal?”<sup>268</sup> Turning his attention to the traditional rights of Englishmen, he inquired, “... is British freedom denominated from the soil, or from the people of Britain? If from the latter, do they lose it by quitting the soil? Do those, who embark freemen in Great Britain, disembark slaves in America? Are those who fled from the oppression of regal and ministerial tyranny, now reduced to a state of vassalage to those who then equally felt the same oppression? Whence proceeds this fatal change?”<sup>269</sup> Wilson goes on to grumble that this is the colonial’s reward

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264. First Continental Congress, *Declarations*.

265. *Ibid.*

266. Joseph Galloway’s *Plan of Union* proposed a British and American Legislature, which would have been established in America. All of the colonies were to elect members to a grand council which would be headed by a president-general appointed by the king. The whole structure, however, was to be “an inferior and distinct branch of the British Legislature.” Galloway’s plan failed by a majority of one colony.

267. First Continental Congress, *Declarations*.

268. James Wilson, *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament*, Philadelphia, 1774.



for leaving his friends and country and “braving the danger” of America. But in spite of the pleadings of the colonists, the British were intransigent. Parliament continued to take a firm line designed to assure its ascendancy.

Actual fighting began in response to the British march on Lexington and Concord. Shortly thereafter, the Second Continental Congress convened in the city of Philadelphia, but there was still tremendous resistance to the idea of independence. After selecting George Washington of Virginia as {87} their commander-in-chief, the colonists passed an important piece of legislation in which they declared what had caused them to take up arms:

But why should we enumerate our injuries in detail? By one statute it is declared that Parliament can “of right make laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever.” What is to defend us against so enormous, so unlimited a power? Not a single man of those who assume it, is chosen by us; or is subject to our controul [*sic*] or influence; but, on the contrary, they are all of them exempt from the operation of such laws, and an American revenue, if not diverted from the ostensible purposes for which it is raised, would actually lighten their own burdens in proportion as they increase ours.<sup>270</sup>

After enumerating in great detail their specific objections to a variety of events, including their naturally biased account of Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress went on to state firmly:

in our own native land, in defense of the freedom that is our birth-right, and which we ever enjoyed till the late violation of it; for the protection of our property, acquired solely by the honest industry of our forefathers and ourselves, against violence actually offered, we have taken up arms. We shall lay them down when hostilities shall cease on the part of the aggressors, and all danger of their being renewed shall be removed, and not before.<sup>271</sup>

Following the Declaration of Causes of Taking up Arms, hostilities continued. Meanwhile, both the British and the Americans continued to operate in their firmly established attitudinal patterns. Finally, on

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269. *Ibid.*

270. Second Continental Congress, *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*, July 6, 1775.

271. *Ibid.*

July 2nd of 1776, independence was declared. In the Declaration of Independence, the colonists reacted to the king's abuses: "The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states."<sup>272</sup> By attacking the king in their declaration, Congress was following the pattern of Parliament. Parliament had demonstrated the vulnerability of the king, and the colonists naturally followed the same line of attack.

In this entire conflict, from the time of the Stamp Act to the Declaration of Independence, the American position remained remarkably consistent. The colonists were defending the rights guaranteed them by their original charters at the time of emigration from England. They were not seeking the establishment of a revolutionary government. Thus, what occurred in America in 1776 was not a revolution in the normally accepted sense of the word. Actually, it was a War for Independence in which the Americans sought to preserve, not overthrow, the *status quo*.

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272. Continental Congress, *The Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776.

# THE DECLARATION OF 1775

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## *Introduction by J. Murray Murdoch*

The initial military encounters between the minutemen of Lexington and Concord and the British garrison of Boston unleashed the series of events which culminated in declaring independence. Historians have spent much time considering the importance of the *Declaration of Independence* itself, but little time on the significance of related documents.

One important source that has often been neglected is the *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*. This document was approved by the Continental Congress on July 6, 1775, just a year before the more famous *Declaration of Independence*. The earlier declaration clearly indicates the reticence of the colonists to move toward independence. In this document they base their plea on their traditional rights as Englishmen and state their concern for the protection and maintenance of those rights. Their fellow-subjects in Britain are assured by the colonists that there is no intention of dissolving “that union which has so long and so happily subsisted between us.” The military conflict is envisioned as a “civil war.”

This document was prepared by Dickenson and Jefferson and reflects the attitude of the Congress. Dickenson and the conservative element felt this was the only judicious policy. Jefferson and the more radical element had become convinced that independence was the only alternative, but they saw the necessity of biding their time. Public sentiment was simply not with them at this point. Thomas Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense*, widely circulated in the ensuing months, did much to sway public opinion in the direction of independence.

DECLARATION OF THE CAUSES  
AND NECESSITY OF TAKING UP ARMS

July 6, 1775<sup>273</sup>

If it was possible for men, who exercise their reason to believe, that the divine Author of our existence intended a part of the human race to hold an absolute property in, and an unbounded power over others, marked out by his infinite goodness and wisdom, as the objects of a legal domination never rightfully resistible, however severe and oppressive, the inhabitants of these colonies might at least require from the parliament of Great-Britain some evidence, that this dreadful authority over them, has been granted to that body. But a reverence for our great Creator, principles of humanity, and the dictates of common sense, must convince all those who reflect upon the subject, that government was instituted to promote the welfare of mankind, and ought to be administered for the attainment of that end. The legislature of Great-Britain, however, stimulated by an inordinate passion for a power not only unjustifiable, but which they know to be peculiarly reprobated by the very constitution of that kingdom, and desperate of success in any mode of contest, where regard should be had to truth, law, or right, have at length, deserting those, attempted to effect their cruel and impolitic purpose of enslaving these colonies by violence, and have thereby rendered it necessary for us to close with their last appeal from reason to arms.—Yet, however blinded that assembly may be, by their intemperate rage for unlimited domination, so to slight justice and the opinion of mankind, we esteem ourselves bound by obligations of respect to the rest of the world, to make known the justice of our cause.

Our forefathers, inhabitants of the island of Great-Britain, left their native land, to seek on these shores a residence for civil and religious freedom. At the expense of their blood, at the hazard of their fortunes, without the least charge to the country from which they removed, by unceasing labour, and an unconquerable spirit, they effected settlements in the distant and inhospitable wilds of America, then filled with numerous and warlike nations of barbarians.—Societies or governments, vested with perfect legislatures, were formed under charters

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273. *Journals of the Continental Congress*, ed. W. C. Ford, vol. 2, 140ff.

from the crown, and an harmonious intercourse was established between the colonies and the kingdom from which they derived their origin. The mutual benefits of this union became in a short time so extraordinary as to excite astonishment. It is universally {90} confessed that the amazing increase of the wealth, strength, and navigation of the realm, arose from this source; and the minister, who so wisely and successfully directed the measures of Great-Britain in the late war, publicly declared, that these colonies enabled her to triumph over her enemies.—Towards the conclusion of that war, it pleased our sovereign to make a change in his counsels.—From that fatal moment, the affairs of the British empire began to fall into confusion, and gradually sliding from the summit of glorious prosperity, to which they had been advanced by the virtues and abilities of one man, are at length distracted by the convulsions, that now shake it to its deepest foundations.—The new ministry finding the brave foes of Britain, though frequently defeated, yet still contending, took up the unfortunate idea of granting them a hasty peace, and of then subduing her faithful friends.

These devoted colonies were judged to be in such a state, as to present victories without bloodshed, and all the easy emoluments of statuteable plunder.—The uninterrupted tenor of their peaceable and respectful behaviour from the beginning of colonization, their dutiful, zealous, and useful services during the war, though so recently and amply acknowledged in the most honourable manner by his majesty, by the late king, and by parliament, could not save them from the meditated innovations.—Parliament was influenced to adopt the pernicious project, and assuming a new power over them, have in the course of eleven years, given such decisive specimens of the spirit and consequences attending this power, as to leave no doubt concerning the effects of acquiescence under it. They have undertaken to give and grant our money without our consent, though we have ever exercised an exclusive right to dispose of our own property; statutes have been passed for extending the jurisdiction of courts of admiralty, and vice-admiralty beyond their ancient limits; for depriving us of the accustomed and inestimable privilege of trial by jury, in cases affecting both life and property; for suspending the legislature of one of the colonies; for interdicting all commerce to the capital of another; and for altering

fundamentally the form of government established by charter, and secured by acts of its own legislature solemnly confirmed by the crown; for exempting the “murderers” of colonists from legal trial, and in effect, from punishment; for erecting in a neighbouring province, acquired by the joint arms of Great-Britain and America, a despotism dangerous to our very existence; and for quartering soldiers upon the colonists in time of profound peace. It has also been resolved in parliament, that colonists charged with committing certain offences, shall be transported to England to be tried.

But why should we enumerate our injuries in detail? By one statute it is declared, that parliament can “of right make laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever.” What is to defend us against so enormous, so unlimited a power? Not a single man of those who assume it, is chosen by us; or is {91} subject to our controul or influence; but, on the contrary, they are all of them exempt from the operation of such laws, and an American revenue, if not diverted from the ostensible purposes for which it is raised, would actually lighten their own burdens in proportion, as they increase ours. We saw the misery to which such despotism would reduce us. We for ten years incessantly and ineffectually besieged the throne as supplicants; we reasoned, we remonstrated with parliament, in the most mild and decent language. But administration sensible that we should regard these oppressive measures as freemen ought to do, sent over fleets and armies to enforce them. The indignation of the Americans was roused, it is true; but it was the indignation of a virtuous, loyal, and affectionate people. A Congress of delegates from the United Colonies was assembled at Philadelphia, on the fifth day of last September. We resolved again to offer an humble and dutiful petition to the king, and also addressed our fellow-subjects of Great-Britain. We have pursued every temperate, every respectful measure: we have even proceeded to break off our commercial intercourse with our fellow-subjects, as the last peaceable admonition, that our attachment to no nation upon earth should supplant our attachment to liberty.—This, we flattered ourselves, was the ultimate step of the controversy: but subsequent events have shewn, how vain was this hope of finding moderation in our enemies.

Several threatening expressions against the colonies were inserted in his majesty’s speech; our petition, tho’ we were told it was a decent one,

and that his majesty had been pleased to receive it graciously, and to promise laying it before his parliament, was huddled into both houses among a bundle of American papers, and there neglected. The lords and commons in their address, in the month of February, said, that “a rebellion at that time actually existed within the province of Massachusetts-Bay; and that those concerned in it, had been countenanced and encouraged by unlawful combinations and engagements, entered into by his majesty’s subjects in several of the other colonies; and therefore they besought his majesty, that he would take the most effectual measures to inforce due obedience to the laws and authority of the supreme legislature.”—Soon after, the commercial intercourse of whole colonies, with foreign countries, and with each other, was cut off by an act of parliament; by another several of them were intirely prohibited from the fisheries in the seas near their coasts, on which they always depended for their sustenance; and large reinforcements of ships and troops were immediately sent over to general Gage.

Fruitless were all the entreaties, arguments, and eloquence of an illustrious band of the most distinguished peers, and commoners, who nobly and stren[u]ously asserted the justice of our cause, to stay, or even to mitigate the heedless fury with which these accumulated and unexampled outrages were hurried on.... {92}

General Gage, who in the course of the last year had taken possession of the town of Boston, in the province of Massachusetts-Bay, ... on the 19th day of April, sent out from that place a large detachment of his army, who made an unprovoked assault on the inhabitants of the said province, at the town of Lexington, as appears by the affidavits of a great number of persons, some of whom were officers and soldiers of that detachment, murdered eight of the inhabitants, and wounded many others. From thence the troops proceeded in war-like array to the town of Concord, where they set upon another party of the inhabitants of the same province, killing several and wounding more, until compelled to retreat by the country people suddenly assembled to repel this cruel aggression. Hostilities thus commenced by the British troops, have been since prosecuted by them without regard to faith or reputation.—The inhabitants of Boston being confined within that town by the general their governor, and having, in order to procure their dismissal, entered into a treaty with him, it was stipulated that the said

inhabitants having deposited their arms with their own magistrates, should have liberty to depart, taking with them their other effects. They accordingly delivered up their arms, but in open violation of honor, in defiance of the obligation of treaties, which even savage nations esteemed sacred, the governor ordered the arms deposited as aforesaid, that they might be preserved for their owners, to be seized by a body of soldiers; detained the greatest part of the inhabitants in the town, compelled the few who were permitted to retire, to leave their most valuable effects behind....

The General, further emulating his ministerial masters, by a proclamation bearing date on the 12th day of June, after venting the grossest falsehoods and calumnies against the good people of these colonies, proceeds to “declare them all, either by name or description, to be rebels and traitors, to supersede the course of the common law, and instead thereof to publish and order the use and exercise of the law martial.”—His troops have butchered our countrymen, have wantonly burnt Charlestown, besides a considerable number of houses in other places; our ships and vessels are seized; the necessary supplies of provisions are intercepted, and he is exerting his utmost power to spread destruction and devastation around him.

We have received certain intelligence, that General Carleton, the Governor of Canada, is instigating the people of that province and the Indians to fall upon us; and we have but too much reason to apprehend, that schemes have been formed to excite domestic enemies against us. In brief, a part of these colonies now feel, and all of them are sure of feeling, as far as the vengeance of administration can inflict them, the complicated calamities of fire, sword, and famine. We are reduced to the alternative of chusing an unconditional submission to the tyranny of irritated ministers, or resistance by force.—The latter is our choice.—We have counted the cost of this contest, and find nothing so dreadful as voluntary slavery.—Honour, {93} justice, and humanity, forbid us tamely to surrender that freedom which we received from our gallant ancestors, and which our innocent posterity have a right to receive from us. We cannot endure the infamy and guilt of resigning succeeding generations to that wretchedness which inevitably awaits them, if we basely entail hereditary bondage upon them.



Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal resources are great, and, if necessary, foreign assistance is undoubtedly attainable.—We gratefully acknowledge, as signal instances of the Divine favour towards us, that his Providence would not permit us to be called into this severe controversy, until we were grown up to our present strength, had been previously exercised in warlike operation, and possessed of the means of defending ourselves. With hearts fortified with these animating reflections, we most solemnly, before God and the world, declare, that, exerting the utmost energy of those powers, which our beneficent Creator hath graciously bestowed upon us, the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will, in defiance of every hazard, with unabating firmness and perseverance, employ for the preservation of our liberties; being with one mind resolved to die freemen rather than to live slaves.

Lest this declaration should disquiet the minds of our friends and fellow-subjects in any part of the empire, we assure them that we mean not to dissolve that union which has so long and so happily subsisted between us, and which we sincerely wish to see restored.—Necessity has not yet driven us into that desperate measure, or induced us to excite any other nation to war against them.—We have not raised armies with ambitious designs of separating from Great-Britain, and establishing independent states. We fight not for glory or for conquest. We exhibit to mankind the remarkable spectacle of a people attacked by unprovoked enemies, without any imputation or even suspicion of offence. They boast of their privileges and civilization, and yet proffer no milder conditions than servitude or death.

In our own native land in defence of the freedom that is our birth-right, and which we ever enjoyed till the late violation of it—for the protection of our property, acquired solely by the honest industry of our fore-fathers and ourselves, against violence actually offered, we have taken up arms. We shall lay them down when hostilities shall cease on the part of the aggressors, and all danger of their being renewed shall be removed, and not before.

With an humble confidence in the mercies of the supreme and impartial Judge and Ruler of the Universe, we most devoutly implore his divine goodness to protect us happily through this great conflict, to

dispose our adversaries to reconciliation on reasonable terms, and thereby to relieve the empire from the calamities of civil war.

By order of Congress

JOHN HANCOCK

President.

# THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AS A CONSERVATIVE DOCUMENT

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*Gary North*

Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent.... Neither aiming at originality of principles or sentiments, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind.... All its authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, etc.—Thomas Jefferson (1825)

## *1. Myths of the Declaration*

Any historical document or event which becomes an integral part of a nation's tradition—the views citizens hold of their national inheritance—will inevitably become burdened with a host of myths. These myths are built around the aura of majesty associated with the key event; they feed off of the respect shown by men and women to the importance of that event. Many competing groups within a society try to claim some sort of historical justification in terms of their supposedly close link to the “true meaning” of the particular event or document. When these myths become detrimental to the understanding of the past, the historian has an obligation to reexamine the historical records, exposing the myths whenever they interfere with historical understanding. There will always be biases in historical writing—of the writer, of the original authors of the historical records, of the seeming randomness of the preservation of one document and not others—but each man has an obligation not to distort deliberately the picture we have of the past. No one's cause is served, in the long run, by a commitment to a fictional past.

The *first* and most famous (or infamous) myth of the American Revolution, and therefore the most dangerous one, is that the Revolution was produced by the Enlightenment, especially the French Enlightenment. Recent scholarship has begun to undermine such a view of the coming of the Revolution, but the myth continues, especially in the high school textbooks. {95} The theory that the Enlightenment “caused” the Revolution is deficient on several counts. First, the term “Enlightenment” is generally misused, at least by nonprofessional historians. “The Enlightenment” is a mental construct, useful for some purposes of intellectual classification, but hardly an actually existing historical entity which “caused” colonial Englishmen to break their political ties with England in the years from 1776 to 1783.<sup>274</sup> Second, few people who were involved in the war—soldiers, laborers, farmers, sailors, wives—had heard of the leading figures of the Enlightenment, let alone had read their works. A few churches may have had pastors who were in some way influenced by Deism or Unitarianism, but French atheism was utterly foreign to the colonies, and the milder Enlightenment heresies were not much more acceptable.

English Deism was never imported in its original form. A consistent Deist argued that God is remote. God once built the world, but since then He has permitted it to function autonomously, almost as a giant cosmic clock might operate. God is therefore wholly removed from His handiwork, an uninterested, or at least only passively interested, spectator to human affairs. A modern historian would be hard-pressed to find any American, let alone a leader in the movement toward political separation, who believed such a God would or could exist. John Locke himself was an Arminian, not a Deist.

Benjamin Franklin was perhaps the most famous “rationalist” of his day. He was internationally known and respected for his scientific stud-

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274. This kind of sloppy use of language can be found, for example, in James McPherson’s essay, “A Brief for Equality: The Abolitionist Reply to the Racist Myth, 1860–1865,” in Martin Duberman, ed., *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965): “The Enlightenment produced the Declaration of Independence; ..” (177). For an able refutation of the misuse of abstract mental constructs in discussions of historical causation, see Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

ies. He was in close contact with leading figures of English and French rationalism. He was a member of the immoral English Hell Fire Club. He advocated sexual immorality for young men, and he was the father and grandfather of illegitimate males.<sup>275</sup> Nevertheless, he was receptive to the preaching of the Anglican evangelist, George Whitefield [WHITfield], or at least to the ethical elements of his sermons.<sup>276</sup> In the twilight of his years, Franklin stood before the members of a contention-racked Constitutional {96} Convention and called for the establishment of morning prayer prior to each day's work. Addressing George Washington, who was president of the convention, he made the following non-deistic plea:

How has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? ... I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?<sup>277</sup>

The convention adopted his suggestion, one of the few of Franklin's recommendations that it did adopt.

The two most prominent theological Unitarians of the Continental Congress—John Adams and Thomas Jefferson—were wise enough throughout their political careers to refrain from announcing in public their departure from orthodox Christianity.<sup>278</sup> They were no doubt well aware of the voting public's commitment to trinitarianism. Adams's view of man was highly pessimistic; he came close to the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. This produced a conservatism in his outlook in contrast to Jefferson's more optimistic view of man. Jefferson saw the State as a dangerous mechanism for thwarting human action, while Adams, viewing mankind as something which was in

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275. Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Viking, 1938), 150–51, 290–91.

276. Franklin, *Autobiography*, ed. Henry Steele Commager (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 118–23. On Franklin's pragmatic moralism—if it teaches men to do good, it is all right—see David Levin, ed., *The Puritan and the Enlightenment: Franklin and Edwards* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), 43–49; *Autobiography*, 91–104.

277. Quoted by Van Doren, *Franklin*, 747–48.

278. David Hawke, *A Transaction of Free Men: The Birth and Course of the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Scribner's, 1964), 41, 81.

need of external controls, was not equally captivated by the *laissez-faire* writings of Adam Smith.<sup>279</sup> But as public advocates of Deism, they were both miserable failures, to say the least.

Edmund S. Morgan, one of the most influential modern historians of the colonial American period, has stated quite bluntly that “in America deism claimed few adherents before the last quarter of the eighteenth century; ...”<sup>280</sup> But it is Perry Miller, Morgan’s teacher at Harvard, who has best seen the weakness of the argument that Deism was a major influence in American thought and culture during these years. Miller, a convinced atheist himself, and a competent historian who knew the primary sources of {97} colonial intellectual history better than any man of his generation, concluded:

Actually, European deism was an exotic plant in America, which never struck roots in the soil. “Rationalism” was never so widespread as liberal historians, or those fascinated by Jefferson, have imagined. The basic fact is that the Revolution had been preached to the masses as a religious revival, and had the astounding fortune to succeed.<sup>281</sup>

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279. On Adam’s economic views, see *ibid.*, 214.

280. Edmund S. Morgan, “The American Revolution Considered as an Intellectual Movement” (1963), in Esmond Wright, ed., *Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966), 177. Jefferson had read very little out of the works of French rationalists: Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence* (New York: Vintage, [1922]), 27. It is true that Thomas Paine, the author of the immensely popular *Common Sense*, was a radical Deist. However, as Bernard Bailyn has pointed out, Paine’s perspective, brought with him when he came to the colonies in 1774 from England, “had been nourished in another culture, and was recognized at the time to be an alien quality in American writing.” Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1967] 1971), 18.

281. Miller, “From the Covenant to the Revival” (1961), in Miller, *Nature’s Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Belknap, 1967), 110. There is, of course, no question that colonial leaders were familiar with European philosophy and culture, including the rationalist tradition. But they selected very carefully from the various authors, especially Locke; in a sense, they used European rationalism for their own, non-Enlightenment purposes. On this point, Bailyn is very good: *Ideological Origins*, 26ff. As he writes: “Referred to on all sides, by writers of all political viewpoints in the colonies, the major figures of the European Enlightenment and many of the lesser, contributed substantially to the thought of the Americans; but except for Locke’s, their influence, though more decisive than that of the authors of classical antiquity, was neither clearly dominant nor wholly determinative” (30).

The importance of America's clergy has been too often ignored as a primary factor in the coming of the Revolution and the support of it. They have been called the "black regiment"—referring to their clerical robes—of the Revolution. Professor Miller's words are vitally important for an understanding of the Revolution: it was a Christian revolution primarily, one which had support from the grassroots level, as well as from the "Deistic" leadership.

Though by now the Revolution has been voluminously, and one might say exhaustively, studied, we still do not realize how effective were generations of Protestant preaching in evoking patriotic enthusiasm. No interpretation of the religious utterances as being merely sanctimonious window dressing will do justice to the facts or to the character of the populace. Circumstances and the nature of the dominant opinion in Europe made it necessary for the official statement [i.e., the Declaration—G.N.] to be released in primarily "political" terms—the social compact, inalienable rights, the right of revolution. But those terms, in and by themselves, would never have supplied the drive to victory, however mightily they weighed with the literate minority. What carried the ranks of militia and citizens was the universal persuasion that they, by administering to themselves a spiritual purge, acquired the energies God had always, in the manner of the Old Testament, been ready to impart to His repentant children.<sup>282</sup>

A *second* fallacy associated with the Declaration is that we generally believe that it had considerable impact on American society during the Revolution. There is little evidence to support this view. Very small attention was paid to it. It was far more widely read during Jefferson's campaigns for the presidency in 1796 and 1800. It was considered a {98} commonplace document during the war years.<sup>283</sup> Even then, the attention of the readers was more fixed on the criticisms of the king, which are less known today, and less concerned with the philosophical presuppositions of the preamble, which receive the greatest attention today.<sup>284</sup>

A *third* myth is that the Declaration has, or once had, some sort of legal standing in American law. It never had the force of law. It was a very superior piece of wartime propaganda, but it was no more legally binding than one of Thomas Paine's pamphlets.<sup>285</sup>

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282. Miller, *ibid.*, 96.

283. Hawke, *Transaction*, 212.

*Fourth*, some authors have argued that the Declaration is, by its very nature, a radical document.<sup>286</sup> The fifty-five signers were generally men of conservative instincts, wealth, and education. It is never made clear why such conservatives would sign a totally radical document. Yet what more innately conservative language could Jefferson have adopted than this?

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shewn, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the Forms to which they are accustomed.

It should not be forgotten that the Declaration was aimed at convincing the French king, Louis XVI, to enter the war on the side of the rebels. Jefferson and the other members of the Congress had no desire to alienate the monarchs of Europe, which is exactly what would have happened had they presented their cause as that of philosophical radicalism. The doctrine of permanent revolution had no place in the American Revolution. This is precisely the reason why Jefferson spent so much of the space of the document in a point-by-point exposé of the king's illegal activities. He was trying to show that there were deep-rooted legal causes for the patriots' {99} armed opposition to English

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284. Philip F. Detweiler, "The Changing Reputation of the Declaration of Independence: The First Fifty Years," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 19 (1962):558–60. Jefferson's pro-English opponents also ignored the terms of the preamble and concentrated on producing refutations of the specific charges made by the Declaration against George III. The best accounts of these charges are Sydney George Fisher, "The Twenty-eight Charges Against the King in the Declaration of Independence," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 31 (1907):257–303, and Edward Dumbauld, *The Declaration of Independence and What It Means Today* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 87–148.

285. This should indicate the illegitimacy of the nineteenth-century abolitionist appeal to the Declaration against the Constitution. William Lloyd Garrison referred to the Constitution as "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell." Wendell Phillips called it a "hodge-podge," and "a general mess, a bowl of punch, of all the institutions of the nation." See Staughton Lynd, "The Abolitionist Critique of the United States Constitution," in Duberman, *Antislavery Vanguard*, 210.

286. Cf. Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (New York: Vintage, 1969), 4–7.



domination. The men who participated in the Continental Congress were the same men who later helped to draft the very conservative state constitutions of the colonies. John Adams was an extremely important figure in the writing of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, for example. These men were not committed to the idea of revolution for its own sake. Professor Andrew C. McLaughlin has put it better than almost anyone:

I think, and have thought for years, that the emphasis which our schoolbooks and all sorts of patriotic appeals lay upon the destructive side of the Revolution is unfortunate. To teach our youth and to persuade ourselves that the heroes of the controversy were only those taking part in tea-parties and various acts of violence is to inculcate the belief that liberty and justice rest in the main upon lawless force. And yet as a matter of plain fact, the self-restraint of the colonists is the striking theme; and their success in actually establishing institutions under which we still live was a remarkable achievement. No one telling the truth about the Revolution will attempt to conceal the fact that there was disorder. Anyone knowing the frailties of human nature will understand the seamy side of the period.... But if we examine the whole period of the Revolution from the beginning of the agitation against the Stamp Act to the close of the war and onward till the federal Constitution was established, we find it marked on the whole by constructive political capacity.<sup>287</sup>

A *fifth* erroneous opinion held by most people is that Jefferson was the sole author of the Declaration. He was the chief drafter, of course. But there were four other men on the committee—John Adams, Ben Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston—and another fifty men who spent part of July 2nd and all of July 3rd revising the document. We know that the committee made at least thirty changes.<sup>288</sup> Congress made some fifty-five additional alterations, including the removal of 480 words.<sup>289</sup> The myth of Jefferson as the sole author

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287. Andrew C. McLaughlin, *The Foundations of American Constitutionalism* (New York: Fawcett, [1932] 1961), 88–89. Thad Tate also emphasizes the conservative nature of the colonial commitment to writing state constitutions: “The Social Contract in America, 1774–1787: Revolutionary Theory as a Conservative Contract Instrument,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 21 (1965):385–86.

288. Hawke, *Transaction*, 160.

289. Dumbauld, *Declaration*, 18.

stemmed primarily from the presidential campaigns between Jefferson and Adams. The Federalists, supporting Adams, tried to deemphasize Jefferson's part in drafting it;<sup>290</sup> the Jeffersonians, naturally, did their best to convince the public that Jefferson was the only person involved.<sup>291</sup> David Hawke has warned us in this regard: {100} "The urge to focus on Jefferson intrudes too often in most accounts of the Declaration."<sup>292</sup>

What can we say, then, about the importance of the Declaration as a historical document? It was important as a statement of the patriot party's desire to justify a political break with England. Jefferson succeeded in bringing some important ideas into the Declaration—new ideas in substance, but familiar in language to conservatives and liberals alike—and these new ideas, such as equality, were used by later generations of true American radicals to justify their own activities. The abolitionists of the nineteenth century are prime examples: they tried to use the Declaration as a weapon against the Constitution's sanction of slavery. Hawke writes of Jefferson's achievement: "He intentionally gave new implications to old terms. Jefferson created so well that his ideas slipped through Congress with few essential changes, despite heavy trimming by the delegates."<sup>293</sup> It was his youth (age thirty-three), his bland personality, his outward friendliness, and his writing ability that allowed him to succeed. "A declaration by Tom Paine, for instance, would have received brutal treatment."<sup>294</sup> The more conservative delegates accepted the document's vaguely liberal language, since they were equally capable of using very similar terms to support quite different goals from those Jefferson no doubt entertained in private. The radicals of later generations could pick up certain phrases used by Jefferson, but

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290. Detweiler, "Changing Reputation," 565–66.

291. This point was made by the late Douglas Adair in a graduate seminar on the American Revolution, University of California, Riverside (Spring 1965).

292. Hawke, *Transaction*, 5. During the Revolution it was not generally known that Jefferson was the primary author, according to the Reverend Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale College: Detweiler, "Changing Reputation," 560.

293. Hawke, *ibid.*, 3; cf. 173–74.

294. *Ibid.*, 4. Bailyn points out that there were at least four pro-Revolution patriot pamphlets that actually presented refutations of the constitutional and religious views set forth in Paine's *Common Sense*: Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 5.

only by reading into those terms ideas that would have been foreign to the majority of the members of the Continental Congress, and probably foreign to Jefferson himself.

## 2. Setting and Background

No simple summary can do justice to the magnitude and complexity of the causes of the American Revolution. Scholars have devoted lifetimes to the enormous task of unraveling the many strands of historical causation, and still great ambiguities and conflicting interpretations exist. Nevertheless, no one needs to remain completely silent, especially when others are busy misrepresenting the meaning of the American Revolution. We must strive to do a better job of explaining the causes and importance of those key events, given the same limitations of time and book space that our opponents are subject to.

The real issue was constitutional, just as the crucial issue of the War {101} Between the States, in the next century, was essentially constitutional.<sup>295</sup> The immediate cause was the issue of taxation, but that could act as a trigger only because the constitutional hammer was already cocked. The constitutional conflict, in principle, had existed since the days of the founding of New England. John Winthrop, the second governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the leading political figure during the early decades of New England, had set forth the terms of the conflict in the 1630s and 1640s. Referring to the local colonial government as being “in the nature of a parliament,”<sup>296</sup> he feared the expansion of political control by England’s Parliament. His words, written in 1641, were later echoed by the pamphlets of the 1770s:

Upon the great liberty which the king had left the parliament to in England, some of our friends there wrote to us advice to send over some to solicit for us in parliament, giving us hope to obtain much, etc. But consulting about it, we declined the motion for this considera-

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295. Cf. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1965), ch. 3: “Alexander H. Stephens: Constitutionalism Versus Centralism.” Stephens, the Vice President of the Confederacy, presented his huge defense of the South’s philosophy of a limited Constitution in *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Ziegler, McCurdy, 1868–70).

296. John Winthrop, *Winthrop’s Journal: “History of New England,” 1630–1649*, 2 vols., ed. James Kendall Hosmer (New York: Barnes & Noble, [1908] 1966), 1:74.

tion, that if we should put ourselves under the protection of the parliament, we must then be subject to all such laws as they should make, or at least such as they might impose upon us; in which course though they should intend us our good, yet it might prove very prejudicial to us.<sup>297</sup>

In a conflict between parliaments—England’s versus the local colonial government—Winthrop and the early founders of New England stood by their own elected legislatures as their legitimate representatives under the king’s personal dominion.

With the triumph of the English Parliament over the king’s sovereignty in 1688—the so-called Glorious Revolution—Parliament’s power went unchallenged inside England’s boundaries. But it did not go unchallenged in Scotland and especially in Ireland. From the first, Irish constitutional lawyers denied Parliament’s sovereignty on Ireland’s shores.<sup>298</sup> Eight decades later, or possibly seven, leaders of the opposition to Parliament’s unlimited sovereignty in the American colonies began to use very similar arguments. Parliament is sovereign in England, but not in the king’s foreign {102} dominions. There are other parliaments sovereign under the king’s reign: the colonial legislatures.

Admittedly, the Americans, or as they simultaneously called themselves, the English colonists of North America, did not arrive at this theory of constitutional law until the mid-1760s, with respect to taxation,<sup>299</sup> and not until the 1770s with respect to parliamentary sovereignty in general.<sup>300</sup> But the implicit division had been present in the

297. *Ibid.*, 2:24.

298. The leading Irish legal theorist against parliamentary sovereignty was William Molyneux, a Protestant, a mathematician, a member of the Irish Parliament, and a close friend of Locke’s. On his importance, see Charles Howard McIlwain, *The American Revolution: A Constitutional Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, [1923] 1958), ch. 2.

299. Edmund S. Morgan, “Colonial Ideas of Parliamentary Power, 1764–1776,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 5 (July 1948); reprinted in Carl N. Degler, ed., *Pivotal Interpretations of American History*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1966), 1:43–72. Bailyn, however, thinks that Morgan has overemphasized his findings that the colonists really did not advocate the oversubtle distinction between internal and external taxation. Bailyn argues that some kind of differentiation between internal and external spheres of jurisdiction was at the root of most colonial pamphlets prior to the mid-1770s, whether centered on taxation or not. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, n. 213.

minds of the American colonial leaders since the establishment of the tiny colonies in the seventeenth century. The question had become crucial by 1770: whose parliament would act for any particular colony, under the king's reign? After 1774, few in the patriot party disagreed: the colonial legislatures, all thirteen of them, were the legitimate American parliaments.<sup>301</sup> Jefferson's 1774 pamphlet, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, spoke for the patriot faction and gained him a reputation for eloquence that helped to win him the task of drafting the Declaration two years later. Jefferson warned the king against permitting the unwarranted expansion of England's parliamentary power into the affairs of the colonies: "The addition of new States to the British empire has produced an addition of new, and, sometimes, opposite interests. It is now, therefore, the great office of his Majesty to resume the exercise of his negative power, and to prevent the passage of laws by any one legislature of the empire which might bear injuriously on the rights and interests of another."<sup>302</sup> Richard Bland, another patriot leader, had said the same thing a decade earlier, but it took time, as well as a series of inadvisable moves by the English Parliament, to win widespread support for the new doctrine.<sup>303</sup> {103}

John Adams, however, put the doctrine into its most forceful formulation in his 1775 masterpiece, *Novanglus*. His words indicate the extent of the hostility of the patriot faction to Parliament in the year of Concord and Lexington. By what law, Adams asked rhetorically, did the English Parliament claim sovereignty over America?

By the law of God, in the Old and New Testament, it has none; by the law of nature and nations, it has none; by the common law of England,

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300. Bailyn's discussion of the development of the colonial concept of parliamentary sovereignty is solid: *Ideological Origins*, 198–229. England actually capitulated to the colonists view in 1778, but by this time the Americans were in no mood to listen: *ibid.*, 227. Hawke argues that Congress knew full well that the view that Parliament exercises no sovereignty whatsoever over the colonies was of recent origin; therefore, they removed a section of the Declaration which implied that it was a very old concept: Hawke, *Transaction*, 196.

301. R. J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1964), ch. 3.

302. Jefferson, "A Summary View," in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Modern Library, 1944), 304.

303. Hawke, *Transaction*, 52–53.

it has none, for the common law and the authority of Parliament founded on it never extended beyond the four seas; by statute law it has none, for no statute was made before the settlement of the colonies for this purpose; and the Declaratory Act, made in 1766, was made without our consent.

Great Britain could subordinate the colonies to Parliament only by “the law of brickbats and cannon balls, which can be answered only by brickbats and balls.”<sup>304</sup> Adams was taking a radical position, of course, for the colonists had long asserted that they *were* under the rule of common law and therefore were entitled to their full rights as Englishmen. But Adams and the patriot party were willing to abandon even common law rights—which they felt were not being guaranteed to them anyway—in order to strengthen their case against Parliament’s sovereignty in the colonies.

Why, then, does the Declaration mention Parliament only indirectly? Why is the catalogue of political sins aimed at the king? Two reasons can be offered. First, the document was intended to win support from European enemies of the king of England, especially Louis XVI of France. A long, involved statement of the history of English constitutional conflicts was not deemed suitable for inclusion into a foreign policy document. That they were against the king was enough to communicate to European monarchs. Second, the very revolutionary aspects of the Declaration—perhaps the only truly revolutionary thing about it—was its break with the king, under whose general reign the colonials had been operating since the beginning. No longer was the king willing to support his first compact with the colonies; no longer would he defend their interests against the encroaching claims of sovereignty by a foreign Parliament. Therefore, the Declaration announced, the compacts were no longer binding on the colonies. It was only in May of 1776, therefore, that the patriots became fully revolutionary; prior to this, they had acted, as they saw it, as English constitutional conservatives, calling the king back to his original compacts with the colonies.<sup>305</sup> They had directed their attacks solidly at Parliament {104} before this time, for Parliament, they believed, was acting against the original intent of the compacts between the king and his

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304. Quoted by Page Smith, *John Adams*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 1:191–92.

foreign servants. They did not break with Parliament's sovereignty over them, since their very theory denied the validity of that sovereignty; they had to break with the king, or else their whole theoretical case was lost.

Another basic aspect of the circumstances surrounding the drafting of the declaration was the war which had been going on since the spring of 1775. Prior to July 2, 1776, the Congress had never officially recognized the war as being a revolution. There were many in Congress, especially the delegates from Pennsylvania, who hoped for reconciliation with the king right up until July 2nd.<sup>306</sup> Their tactics were to delay an official break. The catalogue of military actions taken by the king's troops at his direction which Jefferson inserted as the final six charges against the king was seen as a list of illegitimate acts: there had been no rebellion yet, so he should not have imposed military sanctions against the colonials. Needless to say, the English troops that had been fired at all the way back to Boston from Concord on April 19, 1775, saw it in a very different light. It was the view of English military commanders that the Americans were in rebellion, and their view prevailed in the dispatches sent to the king.

The Declaration had two primary goals: to serve as a unifying statement of principle for the diversified thirteen colonies, and to serve as a propaganda tract for foreign policy. Thus, Jefferson chose language that could be interpreted in both traditional and liberal ways, satisfying conservative Americans and foreign monarchs, as well as the liberal European literati, whose influence was growing in European political affairs. The terms were universally acceptable and recognized by all intelligent readers: nature, reason, natural law, human rights, injustice, and equality. These were slogans to catch the support of Christians at home and Deists abroad. These slogans were the universal language of the eighteenth century.<sup>307</sup>

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305. McIlwain, *American Revolution*, 191–92. Thad Tate marks the transformation to revolution at 1774 rather than 1776: "Social Contract," 377. As to the break with Parliament, this is true; if the crucial break is the break with the king's overall sovereignty, then the spring or summer of 1776 seems more accurate.

306. Hawke, *Transaction*, ch. 4.

307. Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, [1932]).

The charges against the king indicate several of the issues that had disturbed the colonists' sense of political liberty. The quartering of soldiers in homes, once the war with the French and Indians had ended in 1763, was regarded as intolerable by many citizens. These feelings were so strong that a provision against quartering of troops was inserted into the Bill of Rights in 1789 (Article III). Furthermore, the expansion of the English bureaucracy, especially those sent over to enforce trade regulations, enlarged the zone of bribery and corruption. Jefferson singled this out. It had been going on for a century, but after 1763 the pressures had increased, due to Parliament's actions to increase the powers of the local {105} bureaucracy. The colonists, especially in New England, where the greatest foreign trade was carried on, were heirs to an old Calvinist tradition which emphasized the depravity of man and the dangers for corruption when one man's power over another is increased. They wanted to keep governmental power more decentralized and mutually balanced in order to reduce the impact of the centralized power of the state.<sup>308</sup>

Although the Declaration does not treat religious issues directly, they were at the heart of the colonists' opposition to Parliament. The famous French Protestant defense of revolution against tyrants, the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579), written a century before Locke wrote his defense of revolution, was widely read in the colonies. John Adams later said that this was one of the most influential books in America on the eve of the Revolution.<sup>309</sup> Furthermore, there had been a widespread fear throughout the century that an Anglican bishop was about to be sent to the colonies, making it far easier to ordain Anglican ministers here. They were forced to make the long sea voyage to England and back to be ordained, so there was resistance to any suggestion that the Anglican church, regarded by many colonists as an English tool of political domination, establish an American bishopric. These fears were fanned by the activities of the Society for the Propaga-

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308. Morgan, "Colonial Ideas," 186–90. On the fears of increasing bureaucratic corruption, see also Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 102–4, 130–31. On the need for balanced government and democratic theory, see Bailyn, 272–301.

309. Cited by Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 25. The *Vindiciae* is available under the title, *A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants*, ed. Harold J. Laski (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, [1924] 1963).



tion of the Gospel (the SPG), which officially supported ministers to the Indians in the colonies, but which concentrated most of its efforts in winning converts from Congregational and other American denominations.<sup>310</sup> The Quebec Act of 1774, which extended the boundaries of Roman Catholic Quebec all the way down to the intersection of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, also encouraged colonists to suspect the motives of Parliament.

In short, the years from 1763 (and perhaps 1759)<sup>311</sup> to 1776 saw the expansion of parliamentary authority into the affairs of the colonies in America. The patriot party increasingly came to view this expansion as a grand conspiracy against them, as the Declaration affirms: “a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism.” As Jefferson had warned in 1774 when the king had closed the port of Boston in retaliation to the famous tea party of 1773: “If the pulse of his people shall beat calmly {106} under this experiment, another and another will be tried, till the measure of despotism be filled up.”<sup>312</sup> It was a conflict over constitutional interpretations. It was all or nothing with regard to the sovereignty of the British Parliament. If it can tax the colonies, patriots said by 1774, then it can legislate for them. The Parliament’s own Declaratory Act of 1766 had said precisely this. Jefferson and his compatriots were no longer willing to avoid confronting the implications of this all-or-nothing declaration of parliamentary sovereignty. If the king would not support them in their cause, then the compacts premised on such support were broken, and no further allegiance was owed to him. As of July 2, 1776, the Congress announced the end of colonial allegiance to

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310. The definitive work on the opposition of the colonials to the establishment of a colonial episcopate is Carl Bridenbaugh’s *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689–1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963). Cf. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 95–98.

311. Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution, 1759–1766*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier, 1961).

312. Jefferson, “A Summary View,” 302. On the conspiracy theory, see Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 119–31, 144–59. His argument that the idea of an American conspiracy against England was an accepted view among the opponents of separation has been challenged by Ira D. Gruber, who says that it was only after hostilities commenced in 1775 that the idea became popular: “The American Revolution as a Conspiracy: The British View,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 26 (1969):360–72.

the king. The Declaration of Independence, officially accepted two days later, was the official document of this final separation.

### 3. *Philosophy of the Declaration*

The strands of various intellectual perspectives were tied together in the preamble of the Declaration. The memorable phrases like “We hold these truths to be self-evident,” or “unalienable rights” (a printer’s error of the draft’s “inalienable rights”), “Laws of Nature and Nature’s God,” “Consent of the Governed,” and, above all, “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness,” meant different things to different people. Because of this, the preamble is a masterpiece of political rhetoric. As Professor Davidson has put it: “The Declaration of Independence, surpassed by few if any propaganda efforts, placed within seeming grasp the unattainable aspirations of men.”<sup>313</sup> The preamble therefore lives on in the minds of men when the rest of the Declaration—the sections most important to the revolutionaries themselves—are long forgotten except by specialized historians.

What, then, did the phrases mean to Americans in 1776? Why could Jefferson imagine that they would alienate only the most committed supporters of King George III in the colonies?

*Laws of Nature and Nature’s God:* To the French radical or English Deist or dissenting Unitarian, this phrase would have seemed obvious. It meant that a God—an almost impersonal, unknown God—had left the {107} operation of the universe to inevitable, impersonal, mechanical, or even mathematical laws.<sup>314</sup> Nature’s many activities, rather than biblical revelation, are therefore normative for human affairs, setting forth human standards. Thus, the myth of American Deism was easy to create by liberal and radical historians. They simply read European interpretations of the Declaration’s language into the vocabulary of colonial Americans. This reconstruction of American history was beginning in John Adams’s day, and he resented it greatly.<sup>315</sup> He would

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313. Philip G. Davidson, “Whig Propagandists of the American Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 39 (1933–34); reprinted in Wright, *Causes and Consequences*, 146.

314. Louis Bredvold, *The Brave New World of the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), ch. 2.

have hardly been able to believe that two centuries later the textbooks would still cling to what he knew was a falsification of American history.

The fact is that the language of natural law, while ultimately more compatible with Deism than with the concept of inspired biblical revelation, was basic to Christianity in the eighteenth century. All Christians in all countries, whether Catholic or Protestant, accepted the traditional fusion of the Roman idea of natural law and biblical revelation, a synthesis left to Western civilization by Thomas Aquinas in the middle of the thirteenth century. The idea of natural law was basic to the curriculum of every college in the colonies.<sup>316</sup> Patrick Henry, a tract-carrying Calvinist of the most rigorous sort, in the midst of his famous “liberty or death” speech of 1775, inserted the following sentence: “Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power.”<sup>317</sup> Henry, it may be safely asserted, was no French rationalist! But his use of the language of natural law indicates how universally accepted was the idea, as well as its foundation, “Nature’s God.” Each group believed that this meant its particular definition of God, whether Trinitarian, Unitarian, Deist, or simply nature itself.

It is significant, furthermore, that the Congress added two more references to God in the concluding paragraph of Jefferson’s draft. The members wanted no compromising of their commitment to God in the official paper of independence, for they hoped to gain the support of the majority of America’s clergy, men who were not generally favorable to Deism. Outside of Boston, there was hardly a Unitarian to be found; as late as 1800, only a tiny handful could be found inside Boston.

*Self-Evident Truths:* Here the Declaration challenged a growing body of skeptical relativism in Europe; Hume, Montesquieu, and other scholars {108} had abandoned any belief in self-evident truths. But this

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315. Cf. Zoltan Harazsti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 204.

316. James J. Walsh, *Education of the Founding Fathers of the Republic* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1935).

317. Reprinted in the *Congressional Record-House*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., vol. 115, no. 48, (March 19, 1969) H1920.

form of relativism was almost entirely absent in the colonies. Thus, Jefferson inserted the phrase dealing with self-evident truths after his original phrase, “sacred and undeniable,” had been scratched out of his manuscript, apparently by Franklin.<sup>318</sup> Yet in terms of the American outlook, “sacred and undeniable” was a phrase far closer to American religious feeling in the eighteenth century.

When relativism swept through nineteenth-century liberal, secular thought, it destroyed much of the confidence of liberals in self-evident truths. The whole idea had been repudiated by the end of the century by the vast majority of scholars. In the eighteenth century, Christians had a God to undergird the concept of truth; Deists imagined that they had such a God, too. But the impact of Darwinism in the nineteenth century destroyed Deism and brought troubles to the mind of Christians. Darwinism killed off the concept of universal, autonomous, self-evident truths that necessarily bridge all periods of history. Truth, like species, came to be seen by evolutionists as the product of one or another evolutionary stage. Truth became relative over time. When relativism, evolutionism, and biblical criticism destroyed men’s faith in universal, authoritative truths, the philosophical foundation of the Declaration of Independence was eroded.

*Unalienable [Inalienable] Rights:* What was true of self-evident truth was also true of inalienable rights. Darwinism destroyed the concept.<sup>319</sup> The concept rested on the validity of the existence of God, whose own decree established rights. Without God, the State, or history, or the proletariat party of the future, or some other human institution becomes the source of human rights.<sup>320</sup> But the idea of a God-sustained system of rights was absolutely basic to eighteenth-century constitutional thought. If God is sovereign, then the State cannot be totally sovereign. It can be only derivatively sovereign: the State under God’s law. Any claim of the State to be the dispenser of human rights is demonic, for it announces the State as the only link between heaven

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318. Becker, *Declaration*, 142n.

319. *Ibid.*, 274–77; Hawke, *Transaction*, 231; R. J. Rushdoony, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1969), 6–7, 46.

320. Hawke, whose liberalism inclines him to praise the Declaration, cannot bring himself to admit the existence of anything like natural rights: *Transaction*, 245–46.

and earth. Yet all Christian orthodoxy was (and is) premised on the fact that Christ alone is that link; no human institution can legitimately make such a claim. This, in fact, was the central conflict between the early Christian church and the Roman emperors.<sup>321</sup> What God has granted, the State may not legitimately remove. Inalienable {109} human rights are not, said the Declaration, granted by England but by God. Remove men's faith in a Creator, however, and the idea cannot stand. The Declaration's statement stands as a unit or else it does not stand at all: all men "are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights." No God, no inalienable rights.

*All Men Are Created Equal:* This is no doubt the most debated point in the Declaration. What did Jefferson mean when he wrote it? What did the other signers mean? What did it mean to the Europeans who read it? What, if anything, does it mean today?

Jefferson probably meant what many European liberals meant by equality: in the absence of corrupting human institutions, all men, innately, are equal. He meant exactly the opposite of what Calvinist opinion meant by it: that in the absence of God's grace and godly human institutions, all men will act alike, because all of them are totally depraved in the sight of God. Jefferson was always ambivalent in his attitude toward Negro equality, as Daniel J. Boorstin shows in his book, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*. It is hard to know exactly what the word "equality" meant to him. Nevertheless, Hawke informs us, "For nearly all members of Congress it meant simply equality before the law and equality of opportunity. Even plain people of the eighteenth century did not push the idea of equality to the point where they argued that common men with common understanding should lead."<sup>322</sup> The Convention's members simply did not pay much attention to the phrase. Had they known that the abolitionists of the next century would use the word as the capstone of their appeal against slavery, the Southern members would not have let it slip through so easily.

Today the word means so many things to so many people, that it no {110} longer means much of anything. Does equality imply political democracy? The Democratic People's Republics all claim that their

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321. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1968).

one-party repressive states are the only true democracies. So does the United States. Fascism, because it was the voice of the spirit of the people, also was hailed as being truly democratic. Does it mean equal pay for all work, equal pay for equal work, or what? The term is used by all factions as an ideological weapon. For it to be meaningful, it must be defined within a context. The Declaration avoided doing just that.

*Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness*: The first two words of this phrase are taken directly from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*. The final clause is taken from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published the year after the *Second Treatise*. Locke's essay on government, written prior to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 but published the following year in 1689, justified revolution in terms of the idea of the social compact between king and subjects. Government is the creation of men, Locke said, who live in a so-called state of nature, where each man has "a title to perfect freedom and uncontrolled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the law of nature equally with any other man or number of men in the world," and he has, by nature, a power to protect his property, "that is, life, liberty, and estate."<sup>323</sup> Equality, in this view, exists only in a state of nature. But when men band together to form governments, they voluntarily relin-

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322. Hawke, *Transaction*, 187; cf. 219. On eighteenth-century colonial views about democracy, see Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 272–319; Richard Buel Jr., "Democracy and the American Revolution: A Frame of Reference," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. (1964):165–90. On democratic practice in the period of the American Revolution, Charles S. Sydnor has provided an account of the astounding campaign tactics of the day: *American Revolutionaries in the Making: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* [formerly: *Gentlemen Freeholders*] (New York: Free Press, [1952] 1965). On the wide franchise in Massachusetts, see Robert E. Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691–1780* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1955] 1969). Yet, as David Syrett has shown, a wide franchise did not mean that average people took power; the system was still essentially elitist: "Town-Meeting Politics in Massachusetts," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 21 (1964):352–66. The oligarchy, however, was subject to removal from office, so there was nothing like the fixed-tenure oligarchy of England: Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1970), ch. 6. On the post-1789 use of the term "democracy," see R. R. Palmer, "Notes on the Use of the Word 'Democracy,' 1789–1799," *Political Science Quarterly* 58 (1953):203–26.

323. Locke, *The Second Treatise on Government* (1689), ch. 7, sec. 87.

quish some of their sovereignty to a central individual or group of men, who thereafter act collectively to defend property rights. Some men will therefore have more power than others. But property is basic to the compact; to violate the rights of private property is to violate the compact.

Jefferson apparently did not consider property as a natural right—or, more accurately, he did not regard a man's estate as a natural right. So he adopted two-thirds of Locke's definition of property—life and liberty—and dropped estate. He substituted another Lockean phrase, the pursuit of happiness. However, Jefferson's contemporaries were inclined to include "estate" in a list of rights. The First Continental Congress in 1774—before Jefferson's arrival—adopted the phrase, "life, liberty and property," as had the Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Massachusetts Council (1773).<sup>324</sup> Just because Jefferson chose to avoid the use of the word "property" or "estate" should not be used to substantiate anything concerning contemporary opinion in 1776. It was his own personal quirk.

Furthermore, the word "pursuit" accented the idea that the State could {111} never guarantee happiness to anyone. It could only provide the external legal framework in which individual citizens, acting in voluntary, peaceful ways, could pursue their own definitions of the good life. Jefferson always held to the political principle that the government which governs least governs best. He did not hold a vision of a messianic State which could promise happiness to its citizens.

*Consent of the Governed:* This is the heart of the compact theory of government, one of the most conservative concepts possible, or so the Founding Fathers believed.<sup>325</sup> To preserve certain fundamental laws and fundamental human rights—rights given men by God—governments are instituted among men. The government derives its powers from men, who in turn derive their authority from God. The State is established by God, they believed, following the traditional political

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324. The Continental Congress, in 1774, adopted this resolution: "That they are entitled to life, liberty, and property, and they have never ceded to any sovereign power whatever, a right to dispose of either without their consent." Cited in Dumbauld, *Declaration*, 8. On the other parallel resolutions, see *ibid.*, 60.

325. Tate, "Social Contract." On the colonial view of consent and representation, see Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 161–75.

theory of the Middle Ages, which in turn was built on Paul's letter to the Romans (13:1–7). According to the compact theory, men acting together (under God) establish the civil power.

The American version of the compact theory of government, by 1774, was framed in the language of John Locke. But Locke's basic concept was the legacy of English Puritanism. And it was Puritan political theory which had long ago established the colonies of Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Thus, the original idea went back in American history to half a century before Locke's thesis was even put onto paper. Locke's ideas, especially as interpreted by the extraordinarily popular writings (in the colonies) of the English religious and political dissenters, could take such a strong hold in American minds precisely because the terms were already familiar to them.<sup>326</sup> Thus, as Professor Morgan comments:

The only novelty in Locke's explanation of the formation of government was the apparent absence of God from the proceedings, and this omission did not hinder acceptance of his views; for though Locke did not mention God as a participant in either covenant [among men and between men and the constituted government], he did identify God as the author of the laws of nature, which were supposed to prevail even in the absence of government and which government was supposed to enforce.<sup>327</sup> {112}

God, as Morgan says, was well in the background of Locke's formulation. But He was not in the background in the Americans' use of Locke's basic concepts. Americans absorbed Locke's system into their own domestic framework, so that Elisha Williams, rector of Yale College from 1725 to 1739, and a staunch Congregationalist, felt free to write: "*That greater security* therefore of life, liberty, money, lands,

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326. The crucial documents of the English dissenting political tradition in America were *The Independent Whig* (1722) and *Cato's Letters* (1720–23). These have been reprinted as *The English Libertarian Heritage*, ed. David L. Jacobson (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). Jacobson provides a useful introduction to the material. A major study of the impact of this tradition on the colonies has been provided by Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman* (New York: Atheneum, [1959] 1968). Cf. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 35–54.

327. Edmund S. Morgan, "Introduction," *Puritan Political Ideas*, ed. Morgan (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), xli.



houses, family, and the like, which may all be comprehended under that of *person* and *property*, is the *sole end* of all *civil government*.”<sup>328</sup>

Men unite before God and covenant among themselves to form a number of human institutions: family, church, civil government, school, corporation. All are called *government*, for that is what all covenants are intended to provide. Civil government, the theory said, is the State. No one institution can claim total sovereignty; each has its legitimate role in human life. God is sovereign over them all. God is over laws of each sphere of life; man and all his institutions are under law.<sup>329</sup> Any institution or individual violating fundamental law—which in America meant English common law and biblical law, both of which were equated in theory—should not be obeyed. Again, this theory hearkened back to the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579), and to both John Knox and John Calvin, who said that revolution is legitimate if led by lower magistrates against an illegitimate higher magistrate who had violated fundamental law.<sup>330</sup> (In modern international law since World War II, it has been regarded as illegal for a military figure to follow immoral orders. This principle was the foundation of the Nuremberg trials and of the My Lai investigation during the Vietnam conflict.)

Professor McLaughlin argues that in the colonies two primary precedents created the later compact theory of government: the church covenants of New England and the corporation charters under which both Virginia and Massachusetts Bay were created.<sup>331</sup> So common was the covenant-compact theory in the eighteenth century that Jefferson’s words in the preamble induced little enthusiasm, pro or con. The idea was taken for granted by patriots and Tories alike; the focus of the

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328. Williams, “The Essential Rights and Liberties of All Protestants” (1744), in *ibid.*, 273 (italics in original).

329. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, ch. 4: “Sovereignty.”

330. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. 4, ch. 20, sec. 31. On the right of rebellion in colonial thought, see Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 304–10. On the doctrine of “fundamental law,” see Edward S. Corwin, *The “Higher Law” Background of American Constitutional Law* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, [1928–29] 1955); cf. Bailyn, 67–69, 175–98. For the seventeenth-century view of English Puritans and parliamentarians on the idea of higher law, see David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1969).

331. McLaughlin, *Foundations*, chs. 1, 2.

debate centered on the legitimacy of the Declaration's claim that King George III had actually violated the {113} social compacts with the thirteen colonies. In short, within the framework of eighteenth-century English imperial government, was it "the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new Government"? On that question, the Revolutionary War was fought.

*A Long Train of Abuses and Usurpations:* At this point Congress toned down some of Jefferson's more exaggerated charges against the king. The most famous alteration was the elimination of Jefferson's charge that it was the king's fault (or his royal predecessors') that the terrible slave trade had been introduced. Congress chose not to include this charge, probably not wanting to alienate Southern slave owners and Northern slave shippers, who were at least as equally guilty as the king.<sup>332</sup>

Congress sought greater historical accuracy. The king had not been so bad as Jefferson portrayed in his original draft—bad, of course, but not *that* bad. There was a solid reason for Congress's hesitancy:

Congress obviously intended to temper the exuberance that occasionally led Jefferson into misstatements of fact and unseemly exaggerations. Soon the world would be studying the Declaration [or so the delegates hoped—G.N.], searching for errors; America must not be caught in an inadequate position.<sup>333</sup>

An earlier charge that King George III had consciously "adventured within the short compass of twelve years only to build a foundation, so broad and undistinguished, for tyranny," was expunged. His *acts*, decided Congress, may well "define a Tyrant," but no charges against his personal motives were to be made. (The great conspiracy lay elsewhere, in other words.) John Adams originally wanted to eliminate the charge in committee, or so he claimed years later: "I thought this too personal; for I never believed George to be a tyrant in disposition and nature. I always believed him to be deceived by his courtiers on both sides of the Atlantic, and in his official capacity only cruel."<sup>334</sup>

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332. Hawke, *Transaction*, 192. Both Adams and Jefferson thought that this charge represented a major criticism of the king: Becker, *Declaration*, 213.

333. Hawke, *ibid.*, 189.

Thus, the Congress modified some of the charges, yet on the whole it accepted the basic structure drafted originally by Jefferson. The fifty-four men who signed it on August 2, 1776 (almost a month after it had been officially approved) and the single man who signed it even later, seemed to think that the committee, guided by Jefferson, had done a suitable job. It was good enough for them to have risked the gallows in affixing their signatures to it. As they lined up to sign, Benjamin Harrison, a stout man, livened the gloom by remarking to Eldridge Gerry: {114}

I shall have a great advantage over you, Mr. Gerry, when we are all hung for what we are now doing. From the size and weight of my body I shall die in a few minutes, but from the lightness of your body you will dance in the air an hour or two before you are dead.

Dr. Benjamin Rush, one of the other signers, admitted later that “this speech procured a transient smile, but it was soon succeeded by the solemnity with which the whole business was conducted.”<sup>335</sup> The treasonable nature of their act caused Congress to delay the release of the printed copies listing the names of the signatories until January 1777, after Washington’s victory at Trenton.<sup>336</sup> These were *prudent* revolutionaries.

#### 4. The Fate of the Declaration

After the summer of 1776 the fanfare which attended the proclamation of the Declaration was gone, and the “self-evident” truths were seldom employed by those who formulated wartime propaganda. The much-used words in the propaganda war were not “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” but “rights and liberties,” “freedom,” and “independence.”<sup>337</sup>

So writes Philip Detweiler, one of the most informed historians dealing with the history of the Declaration. It was only in the 1790s that interest was revived in the principles found in the preamble, for they

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334. Quoted by Hawke, *ibid.*, 195. This was the common opinion of the opponents of the English Crown throughout the eighteenth century: Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 125–26.

335. Hawke, *ibid.*, 209.

336. *Ibid.*, 186.

337. Detweiler, “Changing Reputation,” 558.

were part of the background of the political struggle between Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republicans. In the debate over the Constitution in the late 1780s, it was hardly even mentioned. Only two obscure passages are referred to in *The Federalist Papers* (No. 40). But the victory of Jefferson in 1800 made the Declaration an officially timeless document. After 1812, the Federalists disappeared, so there was less resistance to it, and less resistance to the myth that Jefferson was its sole author. The French Revolution had lost its most vociferous opponents, so the vaguely Enlightenment language of the Declaration created less opposition than it had in the late 1790s.

The revival of the Declaration from a sort of bland obscurity came in the debates over the Missouri Question, in 1819–21.<sup>338</sup> At first, the anti-slavery men who wanted Missouri to be admitted into the Union as a free state relied on state constitutions' bills of rights for their case, and not the Declaration. But by early 1820 they had begun to cite the "equality" passage. The proslavery faction was afraid that the universal terms of the Declaration could be used to justify an attack on slavery in the slave states. {115} Then some of the defenders of slavery used certain terms of the Declaration for their own purposes, although the conflicting uses are difficult to unravel today. By the time of the 1860s, both Lincoln and Jefferson Davis tried to appeal to the Declaration. It had become a central historical institution. Radical abolitionists had used it as an authority against the Constitution. Defenders of slavery also tried to use it, especially in the 1860s, against the North's interpretation of the Constitution.

Staughton Lynd, the Marxist historian, has written, with complete justification, that "without significant exception, subsequent variants of American radicalism have taken the Declaration of Independence as their point of departure and claimed to be the true heirs of the spirit of '76." Yet, as Lynd admits, Jefferson's own citation of the Declaration in his later writings defended states' rights and Southern sectionalism.<sup>339</sup> Thus, it is today impossible to determine a person's political persuasion simply by his willingness to appeal to the terms of the Declaration of

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338. Detweiler, "Congressional Debate on Slavery and the Declaration of Independence, 1819–1821," *American Historical Review* 63 (1958): 598–616.

339. Lynd, *Intellectual Origins*, 4–5.

Independence. It was written to act as a unifying document of the Revolution, signed by men whose theologies and politics were as varied as Benjamin Franklin's and the Reverend John Witherspoon's. It was a fusionist document, and its success is indicated by the fact that for a century and a half (1820–1976) all good citizens, left or right, have found aspects of the Declaration that impress them and repel them. Thus, it is truly a timeless document.

# THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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*In Congress, July 4, 1776.  
The unanimous Declaration of  
the thirteen united States of America.*

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to that separation.—

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—

Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a

history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.—

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. {117}

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.—

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.—

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.—

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.—

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.—

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.—

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.—

He has made Judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.—

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.—

He has kept among us in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.—

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.—

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:—

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:—

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:—

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:—{118}

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:—

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:—

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:—

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule in these Colonies:—

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:—

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.—

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.—

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.—

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.—

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.—

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.



In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, {119} and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.—

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.—

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

# THE FRANKLIN LEGEND

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*Cecil B. Currey*

Nearly every day the newspapers bring us headlines and stories attesting to some new wrongdoing in high places of business and government. Oil company presidents are forced from office because scandal has attached itself to political slush funds they have managed. Children of the mighty drop out from society and join terrorist gangs. FDR, we are told, was a dirty old man. Books and movies tell us that the destruction of the zeppelin *Hindenburg* at Lakehurst, New Jersey, may have come about from sabotage rather than natural disaster. We learn how the CIA manipulated Allende's end in Chile, and with nary a lesson learned from Vietnam would now embroil us in Angola. We read how the staid Treasury Department has employed sex bombs to explore the private (tax) lives of Miamians. The *Lusitania*, we see, was not an innocent victim of a German U-Boat, but was a legitimate target of war, since its holds were crammed with military ammunition and arms. A new book, *Time on the Cross*, attempts to revise all of our hard-won concepts of what slavery was really like. Our national presidents are shown to have feet of clay: one refuses to run for a second term because of mass disillusionment with his policies; another is forced out of office and must receive pardon from his hand-picked successor or face possible legal indictments; the joy of Camelot is shown to have been a womanizer; and the present incumbent was first chosen as our leader by all the people of Grand Rapids. If Nixon's press secretary Ron Ziegler were still around, he would surely have to tell us that the history lessons we all learned are now inoperative.

Thank goodness, at least, for the older national verities. Even though our feet are in miry clay, we can look back to the Founding Fathers (if to no one else) as sure lights in the darkness. Proud, dignified, above self and party, they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to the task of establishing this nation. Were they really such rigid, starched demigods, as Thomas Jefferson would have had us believe? Perhaps not. A current book revives a newspaper story from

Jefferson's day that Jefferson himself supposedly maintained a liaison with Sally Jennings, a slave girl, for years on end, which produced a number of red-haired, dark-skinned descendants. Then there was the aristocratic rice planter from South Carolina, Gouverneur Morris, who lost a leg while escaping a cuckolded husband at the time of the Constitutional Convention, when {121} the coach in which he was escaping overturned and irredeemably crushed it. There are indications that the man known as the Financier of the Revolution, Robert Morris, actually allowed the war to finance him, as he took immense, repeated, and questionable profits. Some of Sam Adams's actions indicate a certain amount of paranoia. Washington is charged with padding his expense account. John Hancock was involved in smuggling prior to the Revolution.

It isn't uncommon to learn that heroes had feet of clay, although the knowledge still causes us to wince as we learn to adjust to it. And it may have helped to know that solid as a rock, there still stood above the strife that wise, practical, hard-working, ingenious Benjamin Franklin. He has been extolled in many ways, short of having a national holiday named after him, which is perhaps just as well, for the only thing we could do on such a day would be to go to work. Many are the aspects of his character which have been delineated for us in a veritable *festschrift* dedicated to Benjamin Franklin.

We are told of his relationships with Presbyterians,<sup>340</sup> and his views on American foreign policy.<sup>341</sup> We can read his letters to the press,<sup>342</sup> his views on marriage,<sup>343</sup> or study his account books.<sup>344</sup> We know his political positions,<sup>345</sup> and may choose between his Pennsylvania politics or the politicks of Poor Richard. His attitudes on economics are laid bare before us.<sup>346</sup> We may determine whether Franklin was states-

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340. Melvin H. Buxbaum, *Benjamin Franklin and the Zealous Presbyterians* (University Park, PA, 1975).

341. Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1969).

342. Verner Winslow Crane, *Benjamin Franklin's Letters to the Press, 1758–1775* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1950).

343. *Benjamin Franklin on Marriage* (Larchmont, 1929).

344. George Simpson Eddy, comp., *Account Books Kept by Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1928).

man, philosopher, or materialist.<sup>347</sup> Library shelves hold tomes devoted to Franklin's privateers,<sup>348</sup> his travels,<sup>349</sup> and his contributions to America's character.<sup>350</sup>

Authors have asserted his relationships to the ladies of Paris,<sup>351</sup> to his {122} family and friends,<sup>352</sup> to the rising American people,<sup>353</sup> and to American independence.<sup>354</sup> His parables are edited for us,<sup>355</sup> as are his facetious letters,<sup>356</sup> his autobiography,<sup>357</sup> his works,<sup>358</sup> his complete works,<sup>359</sup> and his papers.<sup>360</sup> Writers seem drawn to describe him in

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345. Malcom R. Eiselen, *Franklin's Political Theories* (Garden City, NY, 1928); R. Ketcham, ed., *The Political Thought of Benjamin Franklin* (Indianapolis, IN, 1965); William S. Hanna, *Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics* (Stanford, 1964); Paul W. Connor, *Poor Richard's Politicks: Benjamin Franklin and His New American Order* (London, 1965).

346. Lewis J. Carey, *Franklin's Economic Views* (Garden City, NY, 1928).

347. Wilbur R. Jacobs, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: Statesman, Philosopher or Materialist?* (New York, 1972).

348. William Bell Clark, *Benjamin Franklin's Privateers* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1956).

349. J. Bennett Nolan, *Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and Ireland* (Philadelphia, 1938); Willis Steell, *Benjamin Franklin of Paris, 1776–1785* (New York, 1927).

350. Charles L. Sanford, ed., *Benjamin Franklin and the American Character* (Boston, 1955).

351. Claude-Anne Lopez, *Mon Cher Papa* (New Haven, CT, 1966).

352. Claude-Anne Lopez and Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Private Franklin: The Man and His Family* (New York, 1975).

353. Verner W. Crane, *Benjamin Franklin and a Rising People* (Boston, 1954).

354. Esmond Wright, *Benjamin Franklin and American Independence* (Mystic, CT, 1966).

355. Luther S. Livingston, ed., *Benjamin Franklin's Parable Against Persecution* (Cambridge, 1916).

356. *The Facetious Letters of Benjamin Franklin* (St. Petersburg, FL, 1971).

357. Editions are legion, but the best is perhaps that of Leonard Woods Labaree, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, CT, 1964). Hereinafter cited as *Autobiography*.

358. Jared Sparks, ed., *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1840).

359. John Bigelow, ed., *The Complete Works of Benjamin Franklin*, 10 vols. (New York, 1887–1889).

360. Leonard W. Labaree and William Wilcox, eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 20 vols. to date (New Haven, CT, 1959-).

superlatives: “true,”<sup>361</sup> “amazing,”<sup>362</sup> philosopher and man,<sup>363</sup> envoy extraordinary,<sup>364</sup> the first civilized American,<sup>365</sup> and the apostle of modern times.<sup>366</sup> We have recently been told that he was one of seven who shaped our destiny,<sup>367</sup> that he dared the lightning,<sup>368</sup> and that he was the most dangerous man in America.<sup>369</sup> All this suggests that Paul Ford’s effort in 1889 to list all the books written about Benjamin Franklin is sadly in need of an update.<sup>370</sup>

These books and dozens of others which could be cited are the result of unending efforts by historians and biographers through the years. They have loved, or been interested in, this man and have piled effort upon effort to present the complete but many-sided Franklin to the world. Only a handful of great Americans have been honored with as much adulation as has he. Indeed, few others could have withstood such a process.

To some, Franklin has typified the thrifty and industrious colonial American, and they have glorified in picturing him wheeling his barrow {123} through the streets of Philadelphia. The aphorisms of Poor Richard have intrigued others, and they have seen Franklin bending over his table setting in type such witticisms as “fish and visitors both stink in three days,” or wisely commenting that “tongue double, brings trouble.” And a recent American president (known by some as Poor Richard) might have taken to heart the Pennsylvanian’s advice that “he who lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas.”

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361. Sidney George Fisher, *The True Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia, 1906).

362. J. Henry Smythe Jr., ed., *The Amazing Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1919).

363. Alfred O. Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin: Philosopher and Man* (Philadelphia, 1965).

364. Roger Burlingame, *Benjamin Franklin: Envoy Extraordinary* (New York, 1967).

365. Phillips Russell, *Benjamin Franklin: The First Civilized American* (New York, 1926).

366. Bernard Fay, *Franklin: The Apostle of Modern Times* (Boston, 1929).

367. Richard B. Morris, *Seven Who Shaped Our Destiny* (New York, 1973).

368. Thomas Fleming, *The Man Who Dared the Lightning* (New York, 1971).

369. Catherine Drinker Bowen, *The Most Dangerous Man in America* (Boston, 1974).

370. Paul L. Ford, ed., *Franklin Bibliography: A List of Books Written by or Relating to Benjamin Franklin* (Brooklyn, NY, 1889).

For others, Franklin has exemplified the ingenious and patriotic founding father of our nation who, when asked, in 1787, what kind of government our nation would have, supposedly replied: “A republic—if you can keep it.” He is remembered as the only man to sign all the documents establishing our independence and government. Nearly all Franklin writers have summed him up as Founding Father, philanthropist, moralist, diplomat, politician *par excellence*, essayist, inventor, businessman, publisher, statesman—rightfully known as the American da Vinci.

Major events in Franklin’s long life are quickly mentioned. He was born in Boston, 6 January (Old Style, 17 January New Style) 1706, to Josiah and Abiah Franklin, tallow candle makers. Josiah had some early hopes that his son might become a minister in the Congregational faith. Benjamin soon disabused his father of that notion. Young Franklin tried his hand at the candle maker trade but was dissatisfied, so Josiah apprenticed him, aged twelve, as a printer to an older brother, James. After some time, quarrels having set the tone for the apprenticeship, “I took upon me to assert my freedom,”<sup>371</sup> Ben wrote, and he ran away to Philadelphia. He spent the years from 1724 to 1728 in England, and then returned to the capital city of the province of Pennsylvania. There he launched his business career as a printer. In 1729, aged twenty-three, Ben and a young grass widow, Deborah Read Rogers, entered into a common law marriage lasting until her death in 1774. Franklin had three children: William, an illegitimate son who would one day become royal governor of New Jersey; Francis Folger, who died of smallpox while still a child; and Sarah (Sally), who would care for Benjamin in his old age. Franklin felt the tragic loss of Francis so deeply that even in old age his eyes welled with tears whenever he was reminded of his long-dead child.

The next few years saw Franklin rapidly advance his career. In the year of his marriage, Ben bought out and began publishing *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, to which he added, in 1732, *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, the name of which he later changed to *Poor Richard, Improved*. “[O]bserving that it was generally read, ... I consider’d it as a proper Vehicle for conveying Instruction among the common People ... [and]

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371. Labaree, *Autobiography*, 70.

filled all the little Spaces that occur'd between the Remarkable Days in the Calendar, with Proverbial {124} Sentences, chiefly such as inculcated Industry and Frugality, as the Means of procuring Wealth and thereby securing Virtue...."<sup>372</sup> The business prospered.

As Franklin grew in wealth, he invested in other newspapers, made loans, and bought Philadelphia rental properties and farms in the outlying countryside. He invested extensively in land speculation ventures. Passage of years brought him prominence for his industry. ("I took care not only to be in *Reality* Industrious and frugal, but to avoid all *Appearances* of the Contrary. I drest plainly; I was seen at no Places of idle Diversion; I never went out a-fishing or shooting ... and to show that I was not above my Business, I sometimes brought home the Paper I purchas'd at the Stores, thro' the Streets on a Wheelbarrow.")<sup>373</sup> Benjamin became deeply involved in civic betterment and helped to sponsor for Philadelphia such improvements as libraries, fire insurance, fire companies, street paving and lighting and cleaning, a philosophical society, a city academy, and the Junto, which might be likened to a kind of chamber of commerce.

Franklin became public printer for Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland. He was selected as clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly. His neighbors elected him an alderman of Philadelphia. He was chosen as a commissioner of the peace for the conclusion of King George's War in 1749. In 1751, Franklin became the duly elected member from his district to the Pennsylvania Assembly. In 1753 he received appointment as a Crown official: Deputy Assistant Postmaster General for North America.

Like many of his countrymen, he had had little opportunity for schooling. All told, as a child, he had attended perhaps as much as two years of formal classes, and, like many of us, "I acquired fair writing pretty soon, but I fail'd in the Arithmetic."<sup>374</sup> On his own, however, he sought out an education. He did so well that in later life he received honorary Master's degrees from Harvard, Yale, and the College of William and Mary. "Thus without Studying in any College I came to par-

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372. *Ibid.*, 164.

373. *Ibid.*, 125–26.

374. *Ibid.*, 53.

take of their Honours.”<sup>375</sup> Later he would receive an English honorary doctoral degree of which he was very proud. After that he invariably styled himself “Dr. B. Franklin.”

Such a range of activities could not, however, satisfy the energies of this American Leonardo da Vinci. He early plunged into the mysteries of knowledge. Interested in research and invention, Franklin investigated and improved fireplaces, invented stoves. He developed a musical instrument so well thought of that Mozart wrote compositions for the Armonica. Franklin advanced electrical theory and invented lightning rods. He created bifocals for those with dimming sight. His interests ranged across subjects as diverse as foreign languages, geology, meteorology, physics, chemistry, {125} astronomy, navigation, agriculture, hygiene, medicine, ocean currents, fossils, and the races of man. From his work in these areas, he could have become a very rich man, but Benjamin Franklin refused ever to try to safeguard or monopolize the income which could have been his from such work. “*That as we enjoy great Advantages from the Inventions of others, we should be glad of an Opportunity to serve others by any Invention of ours, and this we should do freely and generously.*”<sup>376</sup>

In 1748, aged forty-two, Ben Franklin retired from business, so rich he would never have to work again. He now began a new career as a politician, out of which he would emerge as an American statesman. He served as a delegate to the Albany Congress in 1754, and became later a colonial agent for Pennsylvania (1757 and again in 1764), Georgia (1768), New Jersey (1769), and for the lower house of the Massachusetts legislature (1770). As an agent, Franklin spent the years 1757–1762 and 1764–1775 in England and was generally regarded by many as the most important American in the mother country. When he returned to America on 5 May 1775, he was greeted warmly by his friends, and the following morning the Pennsylvania House of Assembly chose him as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress. He was active in Congress during the rest of 1775 and into 1776. In that year he was selected to be one of three ministers to France of the Continental Congress. It was in Paris between 1776 and 1785 that his star

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375. *Ibid.*, 209.

376. *Ibid.*, 192.



shone brightest. After his return from abroad, his home state made him president of Pennsylvania. Two years later, in 1787, Pennsylvania named him a delegate to the new Constitutional Convention then convening in Philadelphia. Old, tired, and not well, Franklin took little part in the debate out of which came a new charter for the United States of America. He spent the last three years of his life quietly at home, meeting with friends and associates, and corresponding with others, all the while cared for by his daughter Sally.

In all the literature written about Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the most touching and beautiful passage is that by Bernard Fay, who, in a passage reminiscent of Plato's description of the death of Socrates, tells of the old Franklin's dying moments in his upstairs bedroom, surrounded by mourning heirs. Fay concludes the scene with the words that at 11:00 p.m., on 17 April 1790, "the arm of Doctor Franklin fell inertly on the bed, inactive for the first time, and forever."<sup>377</sup>

The above comments, by themselves, do not even come close to presenting Franklin's multifaceted personality, no more than will the pages which follow. Perhaps he was *both* saint and sinner, but he was surely not made {126} of plaster. Different circumstances and issues brought forth from him varying responses. He was a man rich in the attributes of humanity. Franklin was a great man indeed, and he shall live as long as he lives in our hearts and minds—but he was not in all respects *quite* as he has usually been portrayed. It neither demeans nor diminishes his contributions to note that a part of him thrilled to the sensual. Conservatives should not be shocked to note that for a time he was in the forefront of political and revolutionary radicalism. We should not strip him of his honors just because he was a land speculator extraordinaire—willing to spend his wealth and compromise his honor in hopes of achieving status within the English social world as a landed colonial proprietor. We should be aware that in addition to his more lauded characteristics, he was also shrewd, conniving, opportunistic, crafty, vengeful, ruthless, petty, and utterly dedicated to his own advancement (which is, after all, why years earlier, he had pushed the wheelbarrow in the first place). All these traits were in a shadowed part of Ben Franklin's life which he did not often allow others to see, and which has not

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377. Fay, *Franklin*, 511–12.

generally been recognized by his later biographers. It involved activities that would do him little good if known publicly, and so he remained quiet about them. Had he not once observed that “three may keep a secret if two of them are dead”?

Franklin early and late recognized these traits in himself. He often controlled them and always used them to further his own goals. In August 1788, as he tried to complete his autobiography, he chose first to incorporate into his account a little essay which he had penned half a century earlier. It had been, he wrote, “accidentally preserved.” It was titled, “OBSERVATIONS on my Reading History in Library, May 9, 1731.” Some of the phrases from that essay illuminate sharply certain of his motives which had led him to act as he had during the crucial decades from 1765 to 1785, when the fabric of empire had been rent asunder and a new nation had been born.

Franklin wrote that “the great Affairs of the World, the Wars, Revolutions, &c.” are conducted by those who, while maintaining the public interest, act from selfish motives “whatever they may pretend.”<sup>378</sup> He was not here writing simply about others, but of himself as well. He had most certainly been involved in great affairs, in a revolution, and in a war. His public motives had always been above reproach. Mixed therein, however, were other, perhaps simpler, surely more basic drives from which he was seldom free. Like most of us, he was able to rationalize much that he did, and to make it more acceptable to others than it might have been had they known more of the story. Yet if they did, it might be more difficult for {127} Franklin to carry “the character of fidelity at least to the grave.”<sup>379</sup>

Curious about some hints to this more closed side of Franklin’s life which I encountered from time to time, I began investigation of them while still a graduate student. The results of this search led me first to a doctoral thesis, and then on to two books.<sup>380</sup> Following, summarized briefly, are those findings.

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378. “OBSERVATIONS on my Reading History in Library, May 9, 1731,” in Labaree and Wilcox, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 1:192.

379. Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, Passy, 10 September 1783, in Henry P. Johnston, ed., *The Correspondence and Papers of John Jay*, 4 vols. (New York, 1890–1893), 3:72.

### Colonial Agent

Franklin rose to the zenith in prestige, position, and power during the years from 1765 to 1783. He lived abroad during nearly all this time (except for the months between 5 May 1775 and 25 October 1776). He resided first in England (7 November 1764 to 21 March 1775), and later, in France (3 December 1776 to 14 September 1785). Many Americans believed Franklin to be their most important countryman abroad. The time came when Franklin himself succumbed to that notion.

He saw most of and participated in many of the epochal events which led to the Revolution while living in England: the passage and repeal of the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, American efforts at non-importation and nonconsumption of British goods, the Tea Act, the Hutchinson Letters Scandal, the Coercive and Intolerable Acts. He knew many of those who served in the swift succession of British cabinets: Bute, Grenville, Rockingham, Chatham, Grafton, North.

Serving as a colonial agent, Franklin was responsible for representing and promoting the well-being of the provinces which employed him. In the fifteen years before the outbreak of the American Revolution, British constitutional developments were such that colonial agents gained new importance. Their role gave them excellent opportunities for ascertaining the motives that guided Parliament's decisions on American affairs. They passed much information about such matters to colonial assemblies. English officials looked to them for news as to the state of affairs in the colonies. The agents were, in effect, personal clearinghouses—one of the most important channels through which policy makers on both sides of the water received their information. One historian has said that they became so crucial that no decision of importance affecting America was made without giving the most careful attention to their memorials and petitions, their testimony and arguments.<sup>381</sup> {128}

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380. Cecil B. Currey, "Ben Franklin and the Radicals, 1765–1775" (doctoral thesis, University of Kansas, 1965); *Road to Revolution: Benjamin Franklin in England* (Garden City, NY, 1968); *Code Number 72: Ben Franklin—Patriot or Spy?* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972).

The changes wrought in Franklin's outlook toward England were stark ones. When he returned to Britain in late 1764, he did so with real enthusiasm, looking forward to being once more a part of the society he had enjoyed so much in earlier days. He was a satisfied place holder in the imperial bureaucracy, and a supporter of the new king. He believed that, given time, America would come to accept the new imperial policies then getting under way.

These warm emotions were swiftly transformed into antagonism. By early 1766 he had come to oppose all efforts of the Parliament to rule over the colonies. He taught his American correspondents that each colony had been created as a distinct state; provincial ties to England were symbolized only through a common and due respect for the imperial monarch.<sup>382</sup> In later years, Franklin liked to believe that his testimony before the House of Commons in 1766 had been instrumental in securing repeal of the Stamp Act.

Franklin came to be in the forefront of those counseling resistance to the policies of the mother country. By 1767 he was prophesying "a breach between the two countries."<sup>383</sup> His views did not mellow in successive years. He gave indication of this in a humorous, whimsical game he occasionally played. As Deputy Assistant Postmaster General, it was his privilege to frank his letters. His usual mark was "Free. B. Franklin." Beginning in 1767, when he learned of the new system of excises planned for America under the Townshend Acts, and continuing for several years, Franklin changed his franking mark to "B. Free Franklin."<sup>384</sup> After those acts became law, in letters to America, Franklin urged the colonists to continue steadfastly to support nonimportation and nonconsumption in the continuing fight for relief from the Townshend duties. It was about this time that he began to suspect

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381. Ross J. S. Hoffman, *Edmund Burke: New York Agent* (Philadelphia, 1956), 19. For additional information on colonial agents see: Ella Lonn, *The Colonial Agents of the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1945); James J. Burns, *The Colonial Agents of New England* (Washington, 1935); Edward P. Lilly, *The Colonial Agents of New York and New Jersey* (Washington, 1936); Mabel P. Wolff, *The Colonial Agency of Pennsylvania, 1712–1757* (Philadelphia, 1933); Jack Sosin, *Agents and Merchants* (Lincoln, NE, 1966).

382. See my discussion of this in *Road to Revolution*, 153–91.

383. Benjamin Franklin to William Franklin, London, 2 July 1768, in Labaree and Wilcox, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 15:163.

someone of tampering with his mail.<sup>385</sup> Franklin's activities {129} continued. He wrote that it would be "time enough to submit to absolute Power when we can no longer resist it, when those who chuse rather to die in defense of their Liberty ... are accordingly dead."<sup>386</sup>

Franklin's relations with other American radical leaders moved him, on 2 December 1772, to dispatch some old letters of Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts to America to be used for propaganda purposes. Sam Adams got them, edited them to make them seem much worse than they actually were, and had them printed in colonial newspapers. Franklin freely admitted why he had sent them. They would "spread through the Province so just an estimation of the writers as to strip them of all their deluded friends, and demolish effectually their interest and influence."<sup>387</sup> Hutchinson was on the spot, for he had recently become Governor of Massachusetts, and the actual letters were for the most part harmless. His strongest statement had been that "there must be an abridgement of what are called English liberties," and he complained later, in his famous work on history, how wretchedly those words had been quoted out of context.<sup>388</sup>

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384. See, for example, the frank attached to Benjamin Franklin to John Ross, London, 11 April 1767, Bancroft Transcripts, England and America, New York Public Library, and Benjamin Franklin to Cadwallader Evans, London, 2 December 1772, 69:8, American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia. Various other letters are also franked in this way.

385. Benjamin Franklin to Joseph Galloway, London, 26 June 1770, Franklin Manuscripts, Yale University Library; Joseph Galloway to Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, 27 September 1770, 3:28, American Philosophical Society Library; William Franklin to Benjamin Franklin, Burlington, 22 January 1768, 2:109, American Philosophical Society Library; same to same, Philadelphia, 13 October 1772, 3:126, American Philosophical Society Library; same to same, 29 October 1772, 3:129, American Philosophical Society Library; same to same, 5 January 1773, 3:135, American Philosophical Society Library; Samuel Wharton to Benjamin Franklin, Portsmouth, 17 April 1775, 4:50, American Philosophical Society Library.

386. Note in Franklin's handwriting, c. 1773–1774, L (ii), 50, American Philosophical Society Library.

387. Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Cooper, London, 25 July 1773, in Albert H. Smyth, ed., *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 10 vols. (New York, 1905–1907), 6:108.

388. Thomas Hutchinson, *History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay*, 3 vols., ed. Lawrence S. Mayo (Cambridge, 1936), 3:409.

It was some time before Franklin admitted that he had been the one to send the letters to America. The British Ministry, taking a dim view of the episode, shortly thereafter dismissed Franklin from his postmaster's position. Franklin, however, was unrepentant. As late as June 1774, he revealed that his search for incriminatory evidence with which to ruin Hutchinson was continuing, when he told a correspondent that, "at present, I only send copies of two more letters of Mr. Hutchinson's."<sup>389</sup>

Franklin was not happy when the situation was reversed. What was proper for him to do to Hutchinson was not so tasteful when such actions were directed toward himself. Some of his letters in which he had advised Americans to insist on their independence fell into the hands of his enemies.<sup>390</sup> "I know that much Violence must be us'd with my Letters before {130} they can be construed into Treason."<sup>391</sup> A little earlier he had complained that "a letter of mine ... has lately been reprinted here, to show, as the publisher expresses it, that I am 'one of the most determined enemies of the welfare and prosperity of Great Britain....' But methinks it is wrong to print letters of mine at Boston [or in England], which give occasion to these reflections."<sup>392</sup> In spite of his own resentment toward such practices, he could still claim that "sending the [Hutchinson] letters [to America was] one of the best actions of my life."<sup>393</sup>

In the summer of 1773, Franklin called for a colonial general congress to develop a full declaration of American rights. When such a meeting was held the following year, he supported it with enthusiasm and did much to strengthen the resolve and firmness of the delegates. Uncompromising resolution toward England was necessary, said Franklin, because the members of Parliament were so polluted with corruption and bribery. He described these men in black terms. To an

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389. Benjamin Franklin to Thomas Cushing, London, 30 June 1774, 45:85, American Philosophical Society Library.

390. William Franklin to Benjamin Franklin, New York, 29 July 1773, 3:159, *ibid.*

391. Benjamin Franklin to Thomas Cushing, London, 16 April 1774, in Smyth, *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 6:229.

392. Benjamin Franklin to Thomas Cushing, London, 5 January 1774, in *ibid.*, 173.

393. *Ibid.*, 10:270.

American friend, he spoke of “the Bribes, now by Custom become necessary to induce the Members to vote according to their Consciences.”<sup>394</sup> A little later he referred to the House of Lords as “*Hereditary Legislators!* ... they appear’d to have scarce Discretion enough to govern a Herd of Swine.” Nor was Franklin’s scorn restricted to the upper house. “The *elected* House of Commons is no better, nor ever will be...” The utter rottenness of the mother country meant that any closer union with her would be like “coupling and binding together the dead and the living.”<sup>395</sup>

At the same time that Franklin urged a continuing firmness toward Britain, he also played upon a minor theme. In the face of a great deal of evidence to the contrary, his constant refrain was that there existed an attitude of friendliness in England toward America and a willingness to retract most of the steps which had brought about trouble since 1763. This outlook, he claimed, was held by many politicians of the opposition and by many subjects of the realm. Thus America must remain united and hold firm, for this would cause the government to fall, and in the “next Parliament” the “Friends of America” would gain power and redress all wrongs. In his words, “there is but little prospect” of staying the hands of the ministry from American blood. Yet, “if we are steady till another Session, this Ministry must retire, & our Points will be gained.”<sup>396</sup> One {131} historian has well summed up the validity of such statements. He writes: “On constitutional principle, except for Chatham’s adherents and a few radicals ... England was united against the colonies.”<sup>397</sup>

Finally it was time for Franklin to return to America. The skirmishes at Lexington and Concord would occur before he landed. What might explain the headstrong attitude toward the British government that he had developed in the ten years of his last stay in the mother country?

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394. Benjamin Franklin, “An Account of Negotiations in London for Effecting a Reconciliation Between Great Britain and the American Colonies,” in *ibid.*, 6:371.

395. Benjamin Franklin to Joseph Galloway, London, 25 February 1775, in *ibid.*, 312–13.

396. Benjamin Franklin to Joseph Galloway, London, 5 February 1775, in Franklin-Galloway Correspondence, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

397. Carl B. Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics: The American Revolution* (Lexington, MA, 1957), 281.

Part of the explanation may be found in his long-standing hope of acquiring huge tracts of land in western America. Repeated failures in such projects, caused by the British government, fed the fires of his anger. Ambitious, he could not rest until the day came when he would be the wealthy and respected proprietor of an entire colony.

### *Land Speculator*

Even before his retirement from business he had made several wise investments in real estate, which were to bring in a substantial income in the years ahead. By 1753, he was involved with several others in an unsuccessful attempt to purchase western lands. With George Whitefield, Franklin dreamed of one day being employed by the Crown to settle a colony in the Ohio valley. He also laid unfruitful plans with Henry Bouquet to promote a colony on the Scioto River. The Proclamation Line of 1763 came as a blow, dashing the hopes of all speculators by forbidding further western settlements. While new plans were being developed to circumvent this edict of the Crown, Franklin turned his attention northward; he bought land in Quebec and received a land grant in Nova Scotia.

Franklin became a member of an American speculation company which hoped to acquire an immense tract of land along the Illinois River. This Illinois Company was formed 29 March 1766. That particular endeavor was abandoned as hopeless in the spring of 1768. At that time, Franklin and the other members set up a "Suff'ring Traders" Company, which sought restitution for damages which Indians had earlier committed against white traders. This effort was also called the Indiana Company, as the restitution asked for a tract of land in that region.

Only a year later, the Indiana Company phased out, and Franklin helped to organize in England a new group known as the Walpole Associates. Formed in the spring of 1769, this group was reorganized on 27 December of that year as the Grand Ohio Company. As a partner in the effort, Franklin worked tirelessly until its books were closed in August, 1775, in a desperate attempt to secure a grant to be called Vandalia in the approximate area of present-day West Virginia. When it became clear that {132} a charter for Vandalia would not be issued,



Franklin and his partners began a new effort to secure confirmation to the same region from the Second Continental Congress.<sup>398</sup>

The methods Franklin and his partners used in their efforts to secure western lands were not particularly honorable ones—even by the standards of that day. Memberships in these various enterprises held by government officials were kept secret, so as to make their recommendations seem unbiased. Glowingly inaccurate reports on agricultural, animal, and mineral products to be obtained from a western colony were presented to official boards and agencies. Bribes were offered to men whose influence would be of value, and memberships were given to those whose duty it was to render decisions on charter applications. Two false Indian scares were created to force the government into action. Forged petitions from supposed westerners calling for the quick settlement of a government upon them were used in hopes of precipitating official approval of a new colony. Private agreements with the Six Nations which would have furthered Franklin's dreams were made part of a public treaty. Members of older enterprises were dropped from newer ones with ruthless efficiency when their usefulness was at an end. Secrecy was held in such high estate among the speculative partners that code names, secret letters, feigned handwriting, roundabout routes, and messengers were used. In an attempt to free the Grand Ohio Company from the reputation which had accrued to it as a result of some of his actions, Franklin concocted a scheme whereby he would seemingly resign from the company while privately retaining his stock. It may not be cause for wonder that as a result, Benjamin Franklin learned that others were calling him "Dr. Doubleface," the "old dotard," "Old Traitor Franklin," and "The Judas of Craven Street."<sup>399</sup>

It may be likely that with the failure of each additional questionable method to achieve his dreams of landed status, Franklin's unhappiness with the English government was further heightened. Yet he still strove to achieve his speculative goals. If it were no longer possible to push for a western colony through the channels of the British government, then

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398. For the details of this complicated and enlightening episode, see *Road to Revolution*, chs 3, 5–6, 8, and *passim*.

399. As quoted in Crane, *A Rising People*, 147, and Crane, *Letters to the Press*, 248.

he and his partners—including the British ones—would secure it from the new Continental Congress.<sup>400</sup> As one of his coworkers put it, they would “take into the partnership ... members of the Congress” which would thus create a “thousand political reasons” why the Congress should grant them lands across the mountains.<sup>401</sup> {133}

Not willing to wait for official Congressional approval, the partners met for business in March 1776 at the Indian Queen Tavern in Philadelphia, with Franklin chairing the session. His son, a prominent Tory and a long-time partner with his father in these enterprises, was absent, under house arrest at his home in Perth Amboy. Benjamin guarded William’s economic interests that day, voting not only his own shares of stock but his son’s as well. After electing new officers, the men authorized the sale of four-hundred-acre tracts of land to all comers. Advertisements for the land soon appeared in Franklin’s old newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. It is unclear whether the speculators discussed the fact that they had no legal title to those lands and consequently no right to sell, or to advertise for sale, even one acre.<sup>402</sup>

In spite of Franklin’s best efforts, he made no progress toward his western ambitions during 1775 and 1776. He had too little time in which to concentrate on his own affairs because of other duties. Chosen as a member of the Second Continental Congress by the people of Pennsylvania the day after his return to America, he was faced with a crush of public business. There were letters to write, people to interview, foreign visitors with whom to talk, committee meetings to attend. One of the more important committees on which he sat was the Secret Committee of Correspondence, the forerunner of our present Department of State.

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400. The attitudes of these speculators puts one strongly in mind of the modern economic business giants whose loyalties know no national boundaries.

401. Samuel Wharton to Joseph Wharton Sr., London, 7 August 1775, Thomas Wharton Manuscripts, Wharton Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

402. For more on this story, see *Code Number* 72, 67–71.

### Mission to France

Franklin was chairman of the Secret Committee and took an active part in the early diplomacy of the Revolutionary War. The committee gathered information from Europe and sent agents there to contact foreign governments in order to procure aid, assistance, trade agreements, and military alliances. The day after Franklin's appointment to the committee, 29 November 1775, it chose its first European agent, a Virginian residing in London named Arthur Lee. Lee and Franklin had been acquainted for years, Lee having for a time served as under-agent for Massachusetts. The two men already tended to dislike one another. The Committee's choice of Lee, however, was a good one, for he was a staunch patriot dedicated to the cause of America.

The Secret Committee, the following March of 1776, appointed its second agent and sent him to Europe to negotiate with the French government: Silas Deane of Connecticut, who went to France knowing nothing of diplomacy and less of the French language. This Connecticut yankee at King Louis's court would quickly carve out a strange and convoluted career {134} for himself that, ultimately, ruined his honor and reputation.

When the Continental Congress decided to send another man to Europe to help Deane, it eventually settled its choice upon Ben Franklin, and he became the last of three coequal commissioners to France. Congress's fetish for committees nearly proved the undoing of the American cause because of the squabbles, self-seeking, and accusations that would emanate from the scandal-ridden American mission in Paris. That mission quickly became an unequal *troika*, each of the three pulling in different directions, marching each to the sound of his own drummer.

Paeans of praise have come from Franklin's biographers as they have told of his wartime diplomatic service. Charles Evans Hughes, an ex-secretary of state and chief justice of the Supreme Court, wrote that Franklin had "for all time set the standards for American diplomacy" and added that he was "the greatest of all the diplomatic representatives of this country and has no superior among those of any time or of other nations."<sup>403</sup> Popularizing historian Helen Augur contended that Franklin became "the most dazzling diplomat in the country's history."<sup>404</sup> Another author has insisted that "due largely to Franklin's

adroit diplomacy, the treaty with France was signed.”<sup>405</sup> Still another, unaware of Franklin’s warning, often repeated, that virgin America should not go suitoring to Europe in search of wartime aid, has portrayed Franklin as one of the leading Americans to urge the French toward an alliance with America, repudiating others who were “fearful of sly courtiers and suspicious of alliances.”<sup>406</sup> A reader of such comments would never learn from their authors of the very real doubts and suspicions which swirled around Franklin for the rest of his days.

While serving as chairman of the Secret Committee of Correspondence, Franklin had urged Silas Deane, upon his arrival in France, to contact Edward Bancroft, an American living in England. Bancroft was a British spy, and Franklin fastened him upon the Paris mission like a lamprey upon the side of a fish. Bancroft rifled Deane’s files at will and eventually recruited him into working for the British Secret Service. When Franklin arrived in Paris, he continued to employ Bancroft as the secretary for the Mission. He defended him from all charges, including those of Arthur Lee, who quickly identified Bancroft as a spy. When Lee brought these charges to Franklin’s attention, Bancroft “boldly and indignantly” denied {135} them, “a feat that scarcely could have succeeded if it had not been countenanced by Franklin.”<sup>407</sup>

Inexplicably, Franklin hired other spies for various positions at the American mission, and gave still others free run of the place. One was William Carmichael (alias Pierre Le Maître); another was Jacobus Van Zandt (alias George Lupton). Still another, a sea captain, was Joseph Hynson, who later turned over to the British an immense number of American diplomatic papers. Time after time, Franklin defended the spies within his home, turning suspicion away from them and toward

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403. Charles E. Hughes, “The Greatest Diplomat of All Time,” in Smythe, *The Amazing Benjamin Franklin*, 1.

404. Helen Augur, *The Secret War of Independence* (New York, 1955), 38.

405. Roger Burlingame, *Benjamin Franklin: Diplomat Extraordinary* (New York, 1967), 147.

406. Ralph Ketchum, ed., *The Political Thought of Benjamin Franklin* (Indianapolis, IN, 1965), lx, xlv.

407. Julian P. Boyd, “Silas Deane,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 16 (July 1959):336–37.

others whose only crime was that they were concerned about the slipshod or nonexistent security measures.

The records are clear that throughout 1777—his first full year in France—Franklin met repeatedly with British couriers and with agents of the Secret Service, many of whom sought to disentangle him from his loyalties to America. There was nothing sinister about such meetings, *in themselves*. Diplomats often keep contacts open with nations who are at war with their own countries, and out of such lines of communication worthwhile information often flows. Had Franklin learned anything of value to America, those meetings might have been worthwhile. If he had fed false leads to those agents, the same would be true. Yet there is little evidence that either possibility was the case. Further, Franklin tried hard to keep secret from his fellow diplomats (except Deane) that such meetings were occurring, and we have little evidence that anything positive for his country was emerging from them. In *that* context the meetings become suspicious. Additionally, he carried on extensive correspondence with several untrustworthy friends and acquaintances of his land speculation days in Britain throughout the war. Between his arrival in France and the end of 1778, Franklin received at least twenty visitors from England with whom he met in clandestine ways. Even Lord North, in memoranda to the head of the Secret Service, knew of and referred to Franklin by his old, pre-war, land speculation code name of “Moses.”

Franklin and Deane, at the end of 1777, called for a meeting between themselves and the British spy Paul Wentworth, charged by the Secret Service with running all agents in France. Their request was given to William Carmichael, who passed it on to Joseph Hynson, who forwarded it to England. Only days later, Wentworth arrived in Paris for a series of meetings which lasted from December into early January 1778. Wentworth’s reports to the head of the Secret Service, William Eden, indicated that “72”—the code name for Franklin—“most particularly Commanded [his affection for England] to be mentioned, & his wishes to stop the {136} progress of war in America.” He continued that Franklin hoped “the acknowledgement of the Independence should not be made.”<sup>408</sup> Carmichael, in a report to England, agreed with Wentworth. He wrote that “our leading man” trembled at the thought

that France might soon join America in its war effort. “He wishes no European connection,” said Carmichael.<sup>409</sup>

Wentworth laid before Franklin and Deane the rewards that would be theirs if they were willing to declare themselves openly in favor of an end to the war and a reconciliation of America with the mother country: governorships, principal secretariats of the cabinet, holders of the privy seal, knighthoods, and baronetcies.<sup>410</sup> Wentworth felt there still might be hope that England could use Franklin, for he wrote Eden of “72[s] cordial affection” for Britain.<sup>411</sup>

At the same time, Franklin was engaged in preliminary discussions with the French over the forthcoming treaty of alliance with America. He saw no need for insisting that they recognize the sovereignty or independence of the United States. To others he intimated that he would prefer that this issue not be formalized by treaty. When Arthur Lee insisted that the wording of the document specify America’s independence, Franklin objected and described Lee as a troublemaker causing unnecessary delays and difficulties.<sup>412</sup>

Even after the signing of the French treaties, the Paris mission did not clean up its security measures. Controls over personal and state papers were totally lacking. They would have made a modern security officer blanch and even in the eighteenth century were a scandal. Franklin knew the realities of international intrigue as well as anyone. His knowledge was honed during his congressional service from May 1775, to October 1776. Work on the Secret Committee of Correspondence

408. Paul Wentworth to William Eden, Paris, 6 January, 7 January, and 8 January 1778, Auckland Papers, BM Add MSS 34, 415, ff. 18, 40.

409. Auckland Papers, BM Add MSS 34, 414, ff. 298–300.

410. Paul Wentworth to William Eden, 3d Private Dispatch, 17 December 1777, Paris, Auckland Papers, BM Add MSS 34, 414, ff. 433–42.

411. Same to same, 8 January 1778, Auckland Papers, BM Add MSS 34, 415, ff. 18. Wentworth’s reference to Franklin as “72” was based on a simple number-grouping code used by the British Secret Service. Agents could code an entire message or write in the “clear,” coding only significant words. Whereas, in this code, Franklin was number 72, George Washington was 206, Alexander Hamilton was 7, and so forth.

412. Same to same. See also Arthur Lee to Theodoric Bland, 13 December 1778, Deane Papers, 3:80, and Richard Henry Lee, comp., *The Life of Arthur Lee*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1829), 2:124, 162, 378, 381.

and the Committee of Secret Correspondence put him in touch with many kinds of intelligence activities. He had appointed secret agents for the United States and had parleyed with French agents sent to contact the American government. He discussed with colleagues various procedures to follow in obtaining intelligence data. There is little doubt of Franklin's thorough acquaintance {137} with clandestine purposes and methods. He knew the need for constant security measures to forestall intelligence leaks. In the past, engaged in land speculation ventures, he had used mail drops, ciphers, and other such devices. His experience fitted him as well as any living American for the intrigues of European diplomacy. There are simply no records available, however, to indicate that he ever paid the slightest attention to security measures. Those we do have, to the contrary, show that he scoffed at even the most rudimentary precautionary efforts.

The nature of the assignment given Franklin by Congress necessitated a meticulous regard for security. Some of his duties simply could not be made public or disseminated on other than a need-to-know basis. Yet when friends faulted him for leaving papers exposed, he laughed at or ignored them. Reminders that he was "surrounded by spies" and advice to keep his papers way from any "prying eye" made no discernible impact.<sup>413</sup> As but one result, less than forty-eight hours after the signing of the Franco-American treaties, Bancroft had gotten copies of them to the British government in London.

Even after the signing of the treaties, Franklin continued to call for additional visits from British agents, the most notable of whom was William Pulteney. After his first visit to France, Pulteney returned for a second time because one of his agents reported that Franklin, while unwilling to expose himself to public censure in America, still remained affectionately involved with England and "would be happy on reasonable terms" to make some sort of accommodation with the British government. Pulteney was told that Franklin was willing to have his sentiments expressed to Lord North himself. And so Pulteney

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413. Juliana Ritchie to Benjamin Franklin, Paris, 12 January 1777, 5:13, American Philosophical Society Library; Benjamin Franklin to Juliana Ritchie, Paris, 19 January 1777, 45:112, *ibid.* and William Alexander to Benjamin Franklin, Dijon, 1 March 1777, 5:82, *ibid.*

and Franklin met again. George III spoke to Lord North about a message from Pulteney. He told North that it meant that “the Old Doctor may wish to keep a door open,” which “can be of no disservice.” Pulteney’s brother, George Johnstone, later claimed he had information based on those meetings of Pulteney and Franklin. Johnstone asserted that Franklin had suggested a method by which to bring the United States back into the English fold: the best way would be to offer congressional leaders seats in Parliament. Such a bribe “would be more alluring than any other.”<sup>414</sup> When this statement was attributed to Franklin, he vehemently denied it, but Johnstone’s comments are interesting in connection with the shadowed portion of Franklin’s career.

If Franklin was an astute man, reputed by all who knew him to be {138} keenly aware of what went on around him, and extolled for these virtues by his biographers, he must have known of the duplicity of his associates. Others knew that his headquarters were riddled with security leaks; why did not he? If he did not know his staff was sending information to England, he was less capable than he has been represented; if he did know, he was more culpable.

In this instance—even in the very tasks for which Congress sent him to Europe—he seems to have been less than wholly devoted. Those duties were twofold: to procure military aid and loans, and to arrange treaties of alliance. Yet Franklin told his colleague, Arthur Lee, that “I have never yet chang’d the Opinion I gave in Congress, that a Virgin State should preserve the Virgin Character, and not go about suitoring for Alliances....”<sup>415</sup> Later, to Arthur’s brother, William, “the Doctor replied that it was a matter to be considered whether it was worth our while to ask any of the Courts of Europe to acknowledge our Independence.” William Lee noted that “this, I confess, astonished me greatly.”<sup>416</sup> And Wentworth once remarked that Franklin had shed tears at the thought of separation from the mother country. If true,

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414. William Eden to Sir Henry Clinton, 10 October 1778, Clinton Papers, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

415. Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, Passy, 21 March 1777, in Smyth, *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 7:35.

416. “Conference with Franklin,” Paris, 15 March 1779, notes by William Lee in Worthington C. Ford, ed., *The Letters of William Lee*, 3 vols. (Brooklyn, NY, 1891), 2:537.



these comments do not characterize one totally dedicated to America's cause.

Shortly after Franklin arrived in Europe, he prevailed upon Arthur Lee to undertake a diplomatic mission to Spain in his stead, for he was old and winter was upon them. Lee did so and was successful in gaining some Spanish aid for America. When he returned to Paris, however, he was puzzled to notice that instead of welcoming him and congratulating him upon his accomplishment, both Franklin and Deane ignored him. They did not inform him of business they had conducted in his absence, nor did they allow him to have keys to locked files, although he was equally credentialed with them. Meetings were held, decisions made, and money spent without consulting him. Soon, on Franklin's request, Lee was sent off to Berlin to arrange a treaty with the Prussians. One of the spies in the American headquarters noted the reason for Lee's trip in a letter to England: "There is really some Business, but his Absence is also wanted. We shall now have a clear stage."<sup>417</sup>

After Lee returned from a fruitless trip to Berlin, where his papers had been stolen, copied, and returned to him by British agents, he began his {139} first open criticisms of Franklin when he learned that his two colleagues had spent more than five million livres of public money. Worse, they claimed to owe still more, yet had no vouchers, receipts, or account books to explain the expenditures. He also criticized Franklin's private business ventures. For Franklin had been in France for but a short time when with his landlord Chaumont, Robert Morris, Silas Deane, and others, he became involved with American merchants in exploiting the rich trade with America in scarce commercial goods. Franklin and Deane named the former's grandnephew, Jonathan Williams Jr., as head of the American commercial agency at Nantes in order to control the trade at that port city and to profit from the sale of prize ships auctioned there. Williams sold such vessels short, repurchased them, and resold them at a tidy profit. This continued, despite Congress's appointment of William Lee as the official agent.

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417. Pierre Le Maître (William Carmichael) to George Carling (Paul Wentworth), 24 April 1777, *Miscellaneous American Papers*, BM Add MSS 24, 322, f. 20.

Franklin and Deane worked hard to keep Williams in Nantes and Lee away from that port city.

In another moneymaking effort, Silas Deane and Edward Bancroft joined forces with one of Franklin's old land speculation partners, Samuel Wharton, who still lived in England, to use inside information on war news to play the British stock market. Franklin, if he knew what was going on, saw fit to close his eyes. At one point, Lord North, who knew one of Franklin's code names, wrote to William Eden about these stock manipulations: "[W]e know ... that *Moses* told his intimate friends that something good is in store for them [and] it appears by intercepted letters that they are *selling* for the [month?] of November."<sup>418</sup>

Lee became furious over the lack of effort toward the goals of America and over the mixing of public and private business. He thus wrote to his brother in Congress, Richard Henry Lee, giving vent to his misgivings. His letter never reached its destination, but ended up in the hands of the British Secret Service! When Franklin learned of Lee's suspicions, he tried to weaken any future testimony the Virginian might give. Deane joined in this effort. Franklin spoke of Lee's "sick mind" full of "jealousies, suspicions & fancies" which were the "symptomattick forerunner" of insanity.<sup>419</sup> The two were so successful in this, that one embassy employee later wrote, "I have heard Dr. Franklin say he thought Arthur Lee was crazy, and I am sure it was current enough at Nantes."<sup>420</sup> Meanwhile, Franklin continued to exploit commercial transactions of the United States for personal profit. After his midwinter meetings with Franklin and Deane, {140} Wentworth wrote that "*they are deeply concerned in the cargoes going out.*"<sup>421</sup>

Then Franklin deftly administered the *coup de grace* to Lee. When he learned that his colleague needed a private secretary, Franklin recom-

418. (Lord North) to (William Eden?), 29 September 1777, Auckland Papers, BM Add MSS, 34, 414, f. 195.

419. Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, Passy, 4 April 1778, in Smyth, *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 7:132.

420. Undated letter quoted in George Larkin Clark, *Silas Deane: A Connecticut Leader in the American Revolution* (New York, 1913), 156.

421. Paul Wentworth to William Eden, 22 December 1777, Auckland Papers, BM Add MSS 34, 414, ff. 448–459. Italics in the original.

mended to him a recent arrival from England, John Thornton. Lee hired him, not knowing he was an army major and a British spy. Franklin reported to Vergennes, the French Foreign Minister, that the Virginian now had a known British spy working for him and that he could not countenance such naiveté. Vergennes reported this matter to the French chargé in America, Conrad Alexander Gérard de Rayneval, and at his request the U.S. Congress recalled the thoroughly burned Lee.<sup>422</sup>

Franklin also supported a Maryland sea captain, Joseph Hynson, who had been recruited by the British Secret Service. Franklin and Deane kept Hynson in France on the American subsidy list for months, until he finally got the chance he had been instructed to look for. Hynson's English superiors had told him to steal diplomatic dispatches. When Franklin and Deane assigned him to carry such dispatches to America, Hynson substituted blank paper for the original reports and letters, and sent them off with another captain for the voyage home. Hynson thus made off with most of the confidential correspondence between the French government and the American commissioners from 12 March to 7 October 1777. One author claims that during this period Franklin came "nearer than ever before in his life to sinking his fame in an infamy of corruption."<sup>423</sup>

An American Congress, made suspicious by rumors it was hearing from abroad, recalled Silas Deane and replaced him with John Adams. Knowing of his dismissal, Franklin allowed him to stay on with all the accoutrements of a commissioner, spending in just the last few days of his stay in Paris some £ 1,700. Adams, who had previously heard little of the difficulties in Paris, and whom Lee did not brief upon his arrival, was quickly cornered by Franklin and informed of all that had gone wrong. Lee would soon lose his reason, Franklin said, because of his "anxious, uneasy temper" which made him "disagreeable" to work with.<sup>424</sup>

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422. Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *Western Lands and the American Revolution* (New York, [1937] 1959), 208, 484; Arthur Lee to Committee for Foreign Affairs, 9 September 1778, in Francis Wharton, ed., *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, 6 vols. (Washington, D C, 1889), 2:704–5.

423. Smyth, *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 5:286.

424. Diary entry for 10 April 1778, Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1850–1856), 3:123.

Unpersuaded, Adams carefully watched what was happening. It did not take Adams long to detect abysmal defects in Franklin's financial accounting system. To his cousin Sam, John Adams observed that huge {141} sums had been spent carelessly, but no one could seemingly remember how. Large debts remained unpaid, yet no records could be produced to justify them.<sup>425</sup> Pressed for an audit of his books, Franklin called in his old friend, Samuel Wharton, now living in France, and Edward Bancroft to review and certify the accounts. Strangely enough, these two men found them to be proper and in order.

After several unsuccessful attempts to clear his name with Congress, and after a particularly vicious newspaper duel with Thomas Paine, Silas Deane returned to Paris in 1780. Deane and Franklin had once calumniated Lee by describing him as insane. Since John Adams now watched both of them carefully, they again tried the same tactic. Franklin, Deane, and Bancroft all claimed Adams to be "actually mad."<sup>426</sup> Deane later wrote a series of letters for the British Secret Service which were printed in a Tory newspaper in New York, calling for an immediate end to the conflict and for reunification with England. Needless to say, this finished the demolition of his reputation. Franklin never condemned this act, continued to loan Deane money, and to correspond with him. He allowed Deane to use his home as a mailing address. In 1782 Franklin wrote a letter or certificate of probity for Deane, asserting his belief in his ex-colleague's honesty and uprightness in the public service. William Lee suggested that the reason Franklin had written the letter was fear that it might otherwise be learned that he had been as crooked as Deane.<sup>427</sup>

During the negotiations for peace with Britain after 1781, John Jay and John Adams, the other two principal negotiators with Franklin, were not terribly impressed with his help. For a time Franklin sup-

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425. Wharton, *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence*, 4:245; Adams, *Works*, 3:131; Edward E. Hale and Edward E. Hale Jr., *Franklin in France*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1888), 1:233.

426. Silas Deane to John Jay, Pasay, November 1780, *Deane Papers*, 4:262.

427. Given at Passay, the 18th of December, 1782, by B. Franklin, Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States of America, at the Court of France, printed in *Deane Papers*, 5:116–17; William Lee to Samuel Thorpe, Bruxelles, 17 January 1783, Ford, *Letters of Lee*, 3:915.

ported a peace that would not require Britain's recognition of America's independence. According to some, he seemed to be willing to allow Spain and France to "coop us up within the Allegheny Mountains."<sup>428</sup> A rumor then circulated that Franklin "worked secretly against the treaty."<sup>429</sup> Jay, of course, denied it and defended Franklin's role in the negotiations; but the mood around Franklin and attitudes at home led him to ask Jay for a testimonial to his service. Jay gladly complied, thus helping Franklin in his expressed wish to carry his reputation with him intact, at least to the grave.

Nor did Benjamin Franklin's zeal for western lands diminish during those {142} war years. Periodically, he and his partners worked on plans to further their goal, although Congress had more important matters to occupy its attention. Consequently no progress was made. Even after his return home, Franklin did not give up hope. As late as the year after the Constitutional Convention, four days after Christmas of 1788, he wrote to Charles Thomson, enclosing a letter to be forwarded to Cyrus Griffin, president of the American Congress. Franklin wished Thomson to read the enclosure to be certain that there was "nothing improper in it, or that ... you would wish changed or amended." Ben complained to his friend that he had not been properly rewarded for the time he had spent in France. "I must own I did hope," Franklin wrote, "the Congress would at least have been kind enough to have shewn their approbation of my conduct by a grant of some small tract of Land in their Western Country, which might have been of use and some honour to my Posterity."<sup>430</sup> With less than a year and a half to live, the hope of receiving western lands still burned as brightly within Franklin's bosom as it had fifty years previously when he first began his speculative efforts.

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428. See *Code Number 72*, ch. 11.

429. See Richard Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (New York, 1965), 446.

430. Benjamin Franklin to Charles Thomson, Philadelphia, 29 December 1788, "The Charles Thomson Papers," *Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1878* (New York, 1879), 245–47.

### *Conclusion*

There is thus a real possibility from the evidence set forth here that Benjamin Franklin knew, or suspected, what was going on at the Paris Mission, but for reasons of his own saw fit to ignore the situation. He did what he wished when he wished to do it. If he could make money by sharing in the commercial trade with America, he would do so. If he could divert public money for his own uses without hurt to anyone, that would he also do. If nepotism, freely practiced, would help members of his family, he could countenance and support that. Having lived away from America for so many years, he was perhaps more English than colonial; certainly more cosmopolitan than he could have been in America. Perhaps he came to regret, because of his English associations and memories, the strong stand he and his countrymen had taken in 1776 on separation, and hoped for an opportunity to heal the breach if he could.

Franklin had more status, more of a reputation, more ability, than any of his colleagues in Europe, and he resented having to answer to them, or to explain his reasons for doing what he wished. Silas Deane he could dominate; the others he could not. For that reason he felt most comfortable with Deane and chose to work solely with him until Deane was recalled; after that time Franklin worked alone.

With all his fame, Franklin was not satisfied. He wished not only fame, {143} but also great wealth and social status. In his day that could come only through possession of landed estates. For years he sought success in land ventures, but achievement of this goal proved permanently elusive.

To maintain his ability to participate in such endeavors he had to hold onto his political positions both in America and in England. This sometimes necessitated his saying things that hurt imperial ties between Britain and America. Then, while in France during the war, Franklin was asked to come out openly on behalf of reunion with the mother country. Willing to help in quiet ways toward that end when he could, he was never able to take that step publicly, in spite of many temptations to do so. He watched his colleague Silas Deane do so and saw the fury which was vented upon him for that act of public treason. Old, tired, still desirous of keeping contact with as many camps as pos-

sible, Benjamin Franklin became more and more concerned about being able to take his honor intact to the grave.

His motives during the war years might be summarized in the following way. Benjamin Franklin wanted to win the American Revolution. No matter who lost—the United States, France, England—Benjamin Franklin wanted to win. In some ways he did. His honor remained intact. He gained new renown. He was rewarded by a grateful nation with additional positions of public responsibility. His secrets generally remained hidden. That he did not win completely, that baronial estates in the back country of America never became either his or his heirs', was something Franklin could not have foreseen.

### *Epilogue: The Book Review Game*

Much of the account just set forth has not previously been assembled in this form. In other places we have been shown only bits and pieces of this study. It is unfortunate, for it was a dramatic story and well worth the recounting. It is also, in its barest outlines, a summary of that which I have set forth in great detail elsewhere in something like a thousand pages of print, using material that here could not even be hinted at because of space limitations. I have not here, or elsewhere, pretended to write a “balanced” picture of Franklin (for I have focused on his shadows), any more than others who have ignored those dark places have written “balanced” portrayals. Others have written copiously of nearly every possible aspect of his life and works, yet only an occasional author has even hinted at the material upon which I have dwelt. It seemed time for this material to be brought to the attention of scholars in the field of history. One reviewer wrote that “we are in Currey’s debt” for the offering I made. He went on to conclude, “I doubt, however, that we have the maturity to acknowledge the debt.”<sup>431</sup> He was prescient. {144} *Code Number 72* quickly received a great deal of attention after its release in December 1972. United Press International wrote a wire service article on its major themes and released it to the press. The story was run in papers all across the nation and in Canada. I was interviewed on numerous television and radio station talk shows. *Time Magazine* wrote a lead news article about the book. Editorials

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431. Forrest McDonald, *William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (January 1974).

were based on its findings. All this was an unlikely fate for a Franklin scholar.

Reviews ranged the gamut from high praise to hysterical rejection. They included phrases such as “extremely responsible,” “well-constructed,” “the story of the intrigue, deception, and greed surrounding the American Mission in France.”<sup>432</sup> Others spoke of it as an “exciting spy story,” “superb scholarship and vivid narrative skill.”<sup>433</sup> One reviewer said that “Currey’s argument is strong and effective. It is well presented and provides a needed corrective to the prevailing Franklin mystique.”<sup>434</sup> The Los Angeles *Times* stated the book to be “impressive on several counts: first, as a history of espionage and secret diplomacy in the Revolutionary War; second, as an examination of the nether side of Franklin’s very complex character.”<sup>435</sup> An editorial stated, “It hurts, but our national myth should survive the revelation of human fallibility as well as our nation has survived the reality of it... And nothing that brings us closer to the truth of what happened can do other than enhance the marvel, no matter what it does to individual reputations.”<sup>436</sup>

If one followed the reviews then appearing, he might read such comments as, “some very damaging material comes to light,”<sup>437</sup> or see the book described as a tale about Franklin as “an 18th century Mata Hari. A James Bond with bifocals. A spy who not only came in from the cold, but invented the Franklin stove to keep warm.”<sup>438</sup>

Others were not as pleased by the material in the book and wrote reviews accordingly. I must confess, however, that some of their reviews put me in mind of a comment once made by Lord Brougham of England, who for a time reviewed books for the *Manchester Review*: “I never read a book before reviewing it, for doing so prejudices me terribly.” One article, appearing in a national magazine, tried to describe

432. Sheldon Frank, *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 January 1973.

433. M. W. Bell, *Nashville Graphic*, 18 January 1973.

434. Fred Buchstein, *Cleveland Press*, 12 January 1973.

435. Robert Kirsch, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 February 1973.

436. *Washington Daily News*, 9 January 1973.

437. John Willson, *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 12 May 1973.

438. Charles McNamara, *Philadelphia Magazine* 64 (September 1973): 9.



my findings but botched them rather thoroughly. Gently chiding its author in a letter for his misrepresentations, he replied, "I will state bluntly here that I have not read your book because the title speaks for itself. The question it raises is {145} preposterous."<sup>439</sup> And this came from a supposed historian who has written two books on Franklin!

Someone else reviewed the book as "badly written and totally unconvincing,"<sup>440</sup> while a like-minded soul wrote that "I cannot accept as valid any evidence in Mr. Currey's case against Ben Franklin."<sup>441</sup> Others described it as including "attempted innuendos and poorly disguised leaps in logic,"<sup>442</sup> as "contrived," with "selective inattention to details of his subject's life, convenient omissions of historical context and an excessive reliance on highly prejudiced primary sources."<sup>443</sup> The latter reviewer, a young man with a mint-new Master's degree, seemed not to realize the basic brute fact that *all* primary sources are "highly prejudiced" and that objectivity is not a simple matter.

A vitriolic denunciation dismissed *Code Number 72* as "a literary abortion," and added that "such smut sells books and makes reputations of sorts for aspiring men of letters; only incidentally does it pander to the iconoclastic instinct in petty men to pull down the monumental reputations of their betters."<sup>444</sup> This writer dismissed my first book, *Road to Revolution*, as "warmed over gossip two centuries old, maledictions and imprecations of Poor Richard's political enemies and Tory historians. Needless to say, it did not win him an endowed chair at the University of Pennsylvania." Of *Code Number 72*, that reviewer wrote, "If he were a lawyer, his case would be thrown out of court." A man of opposing views wrote that "on the evidence thus presented, in this reviewer's judgment, any jury in the land would vote to convict. So would any panel of historians, were the accused anyone of lesser stature than Franklin."<sup>445</sup> I tended to agree with the second opin-

439. Thomas Fleming to the author, 8 April 1974.

440. Thomas Fox, *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, 28 January 1973.

441. Lillian Gregson, *Dekalb New Era*, 8 February 1973.

442. Ed Hendricks, *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, 4 March 1973.

443. William Pearl, *Washington Sunday Star and Daily News*, 18 March 1973.

444. J. C. Boswell, *Washington Daily News*, 25 February 1973.

445. McDonald, *William and Mary Quarterly*.

ion, inasmuch as I had had a Federal District Judge read the manuscript while it was in draft form and give me an opinion as to the evidence presented and the manner in which it was offered. He indicated that in court it would be a powerful case!

Reviews in professional journals brought reactions as varied as those in newspapers. A writer in *The Historian*, organ of the historical honor society, Phi Alpha Theta, declaimed that Currey “does not have the evidence” and that the book was “wildly inaccurate.” He did loosen up to admit that I “should be commended for exposing the bickering that wracked the American mission in France, something that too many historians have brushed aside...”<sup>446</sup> Now that bickering was either caused by nothing, {146} or by something. If by nothing, then earlier historians acted properly in brushing it aside. If caused by something, that cause was either imaginary or real. Whereas other historians had described it as largely imaginary, produced by perceived (as opposed to real) grievances harbored by Arthur Lee, William Lee, Ralph Izard, and John Adams toward Ben Franklin and Silas Deane, I came finally to accept the opposite view. An examination of new evidence, coupled with a reexamination of earlier material, seemed to show conclusively that the “bickering” was the epiphenomena for real and divisive differences. This point the reviewer seemed to miss.

Evaluators tended to fault me also because one or more of their favorite secondary sources did not appear either in footnotes or in bibliography. Some of those works which would have been “invaluable” to me included Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy*; Richard W. Van Alstyne, *Empire and Independence*; Lawrence Kaplan, *Colonies into Nation*, and others.<sup>447</sup> Presumably these were suggested because I did not mention them in print. My days as a neophyte have long since passed. What the reviewers should have realized, but did not, was that I had indeed checked those sources, found them unhelpful, and thus did not use them.

The most curious of the reviews, however, was that by a man who has been trying for some years to discredit my findings. P. L. Smith,

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446. C. L. Egan, *Historian* 36, no. 1 (November 1973).

447. Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin*; Richard W. Van Alstyne, *Empire and Independence* (Wiley, 1965); Lawrence Kaplan, *Colonies into Nation* (New York, 1972).

writing in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, referred to a little piece he had earlier printed in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, which challenged an assertion I had made in *Road to Revolution*. In that book of 395 pages of text, I devoted sixteen pages to discussion of a manuscript I had uncovered in the American Philosophical Society Library. On the face of it, the film of that manuscript (I never saw the original nor was able to learn where it might be located) indicated that, in the spring of 1771, Benjamin Franklin was in grave danger of arrest in Britain.

Startled at finding it amidst other miscellaneous Franklin materials, I checked with several staff members (including Whitfield Bell, archivist, and later a subeditor on the Labaree *Franklin Papers* project). No one could tell me its source, where the original might be, nor how it fit into the overall pattern of Franklin manuscripts. The staff members with whom I talked, however, agreed that it was an extremely interesting piece of information. And so I used it in my *Road to Revolution*, relating it to other sources (from Carl Van Doren to Henri Doniol to Roger Burlingame to Helen Augur to Franklin Wickwire)—all of whom had also touched upon the same subject: that of Franklin's involvement in helping the colonies to arm themselves prior to the outbreak of conflict. I pointed out that the {147} document did not fit easily into the pattern of Franklin's life at the time, and noted that I had not consulted the original by citing the source as "Film 54–61, Frame 201."

In his "corrective" piece in the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, Smith's tone was already intemperate and his words accusatory. He pedantically pointed out that the document referred not to Benjamin Franklin but to Michael Franklin! He may well be correct and his criticism would have been welcome had it really been set forth as a correction and not a condemnation. I am obviously capable of error and do not object when others essay to instruct me. Smith, however, was unable to stop with instruction and moved on to charges and innuendos of dishonesty to speak of "fabricated evidence." Fabricated indeed! For on the same strip of film which included the disputed document was a comment in an unknown hand which stated, "Unknown and extraordinary fact in Franklin's life," and it went on to speculate as to the possible reasons why he should be in danger of arrest. Thus the document on "Frank-

lin's" arrest had already fooled someone sufficiently to photograph it, write a note on it, and deposit it in the American Philosophical Library among "miscellaneous manuscripts" relating to Benjamin Franklin. After Smith's criticism appeared, I tried the microfilm reproduction of the document out on a colleague who has had considerable experience with eighteenth-century manuscripts. He immediately assumed that the letter spoke about Benjamin Franklin. Even when I pointed out the squiggle in the name that was supposed to be a "c," he thought it to be only a common misspelling of Benjamin Franklin's name. Smith went on to refer glowingly to two negative reviews of *Road to Revolution* as "the most comprehensive evaluations that I have seen." He had not looked far!

Those reviews were written by J. J. Zimmerman and R. Ketcham. When Ketcham reviewed my book, he could not have been ignorant of the fact that in my work I had evaluated a document collection he had edited and found its introduction to be inadequate. I wrote that "his depiction of England's governmental workings shows no acquaintance with [recent] landmark books..."<sup>448</sup> It would have been strange indeed had he approved of my book, and he did not, but he was still able to speak of it, in part, as "well informed, sophisticated," and agreed that Franklin was "shown to have been more assiduous, and perhaps more devious, in his land speculating than has usually been portrayed," which after all was the point of the monograph. Zimmerman's "review" was simply ridiculous. Some years ago, when I first began Franklin research, I had written to him for information which he refused to give. Our personal relationship was not furthered at a later time when we met at a gathering of Kansas teachers of {148} history. In his "review," Zimmerman seized on the fact that I had used "descriptive adjectives to demean Franklin and to enhance the character of those with whom Franklin disagreed." Until the moment I read that sentence, I had been unaware that there were any adjectives other than descriptive ones! Instead of reviewing the book, Zimmerman spent most of his space trying to correct an obviously peripheral portion of my monograph which was inserted in the manuscript as an afterthought at the urging of my editor, and thus was not crucial to the main thesis. The position I

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448. *Road to Revolution*, 7, n. 19.

took thereon, however, did not happen to agree with his own doctoral thesis and so he spent his allotment of words explaining how “faulty” *one* chapter was. He chose not to admit that the chapter was based on respected, published material!

James Hutson reviewed *Road to Revolution* (that “discredited piece of fabrication”!) for the *American Historical Review*. Hutson described the book as “well-written” and one which “admirably covers Franklin’s activities in land speculation (the uniform failure of which ... was an important factor in turning him against Great Britain). And it supplies a needed corrective to those who would view Franklin as more moderate than he was for a longer period than he was.”<sup>449</sup> Hutson’s stature in the historical profession exceeds many of the others here mentioned. That does not make him right, but it makes him worth mentioning in any fair, critical examination.

P. L. Smith returned to the attack. Charged with reviewing *Code Number 72*, he saw fit to ignore his responsibility and rather to write again about *Road to Revolution* in as unprofessional a manner as I have seen in years of reading reviews, using his “review” as a platform for a blatant personal attack. Now I did not care whether Smith ever agreed with me, nor would I have minded if he simply addressed himself to a negative review or to examination of evidence without such an obvious show of righteous irritability. Inevitably, however, he was incapable of this, and his words went beyond reviewing into polemics.

He cited his own brief note in the *Pennsylvania Magazine* (which he did not claim as his own, perhaps in hopes of lending it greater credence!) and charged that *Road to Revolution* was based (entirely?) on “fabricated” evidence. He claimed that *Code Number 72* was written to “cash in on reader interest in scandal.” Such an announcement would seem to reveal his own problems more than to describe my intentions. Perhaps his own work on Loyalists was done in order to “cash in” on sales to descendants of those early Tories, but he should not impugn to me his own motives. He declared with sinaitic finality that I “hedge” on my conclusions, when even {149} a casual reading of the book reveals that I list several possible solutions to Franklin’s behavior and then suggest my own feelings on the matter. Smith asserted that I did not use “a

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449. James Hutson, *American Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (1969).

single piece of solid evidence,” thus demonstrating that he has a very strained view indeed of what constitutes evidence. He then criticized me for not telling the world that the British Secret Service code number for George Washington was “206,” and went on to say that, “revealing a rare bit of wisdom, Currey apparently decided that a book bearing the title *Code Number 206* would not sell.” Presumably those words were an effort at a powerful, and witty, stroke to utterly demolish the book in the minds of his readers, but if that is his best, no one will ever accuse him of being a “giant in the land.” His piece, intemperate, unfair, and written with shrill hysteria, was a “non-review,” an unfortunate example of a type of attack which has become too prevalent within the historical profession. In what must have been a most galling moment, even Smith had to admit that “Currey marshals considerable evidence on Franklin’s questionable treatment of certain of his colleagues in France when they attempted exposure of profiteering and charged him with covering up the misdeeds of men such as Silas Deane and Edward Bancroft, who have since been discovered to have been embroiled in overt treasonous activities.”<sup>450</sup>

The last review I will mention appeared in the journal devoted to early American history and culture, *The William and Mary Quarterly*. It was written by a man with impeccable credentials in the historical profession, Forrest McDonald. He wrote:

Because Cecil Currey is neither paranoid nor a muckraker, but a cautious, tough-minded scholar, one can imagine, what he went through before writing such things about a sainted Founding Father—and one whom, despite everything, Currey obviously admires. Somewhere along the line, evidence of Franklin’s shady dealings began to mount, corroborating the long-known but long-disregarded charges made by Arthur Lee, Ralph Izard, and John Adams.

He went on to say that, “anticipating rigorous skepticism, he built his case *as a case*—leaving out no contrary evidence but carefully laying, as a prosecuting attorney does, fact upon logical inference upon innuendo upon more fact until, as the jurists say, no shadow of a reasonable doubt remained.” McDonald went on to add that Currey

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450. For a real laugh, see this “review” by P. Smith, *Florida Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (January 1974).

challenges us to grow up right away, to look at our Revolution with neither childish innocence nor adolescent cynicism but with adult sophistication. We can scarcely be accused of having viewed the subject maturely so far; we have been strongly influenced by knowing how it came out, have assumed that choices were clean-cut, and have regarded only those who sided with the winners as patriots. But Franklin {150} did not know how it was going to come out, nor did he see the issue as clean-cut.

The reviewer went on to remind his readers of something too often forgotten. “To be sure, when he came ‘home’ in 1775 he was angry over his recent treatment in London, and in the ardor of the hour it was easy to be swept up in the cry for independence. But he had lived in England almost continuously for eighteen years, and like many other Americans he loved his England as much as he loved his America. Late in 1776, as the reality of what had been done in the summer began to soak in, he assuredly was not alone if he awoke to a fear that he and his countrymen had made a horrible mistake.”

Forrest McDonald then set forth a series of contrasts.

Well, then. Is Franklin no longer to be regarded as a ‘patriot’ if he subsequently sought (in the wily ways dictated by life-long habit) to effect a reconciliation? Then John Dickinson must also be judged a villain. Is Franklin to be blamed if he exploited his position for profit? Then most congressmen, most merchants from Baltimore to Portsmouth, and George Washington himself are also culpable. Is he to be castigated if, upon finding that the stand he had taken jeopardized everything he had lived and worked for, he opted to hedge his bets? Then we are all to be castigated, for there is a bit of the trimmer in almost all of us, and the exceptions we call fanatics. Finally, is he to be despised because, hoping for reconciliation, he did not openly say so? Then why do we not regard Silas Deane as a good and honorable man?

From these thoughts McDonald drew a wise conclusion. He described our forebears as “neither entirely good and wise men nor entirely evil and misguided men. They were ... impelled by their own foibles and by circumstances they could only partly control, [and] found themselves making an awesome decision that entailed endless subsequent decisions ... with vast numbers of components, all ambiguous.” He concluded with a passage already previously quoted: “We are in Currey’s debt for giving us ... a perceptive account of how one emi-

nent American felt the problem and dealt with it. I doubt, however, that we have the maturity to acknowledge the debt.”<sup>451</sup>

As I have already indicated, he was prescient. Calls by others for sessions at two national history conferences to discuss the “Currey thesis” have been met with silence. Pro-Franklin bias, coupled with an unwillingness to discuss or examine contrary and disquieting evidence, has, at least for a time, consigned the ideas in *Code Number 72* to some historical limbo. The call from this journal for an article discussing these ideas {151} came as a surprise—welcome—but still a surprise. Both *Road to Revolution* and *Code Number 72* are now out of print, although one publisher plans to bring out another edition of the former and a second publisher is considering a paperback edition of the latter. Only time will tell whether the profession has the “maturity” really to talk about these ideas—without rancor and slander—but with a desire truly to know the past. It would not, after all, be an unworthy goal for historians.

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451. McDonald, *William and Mary Quarterly*.



# THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA

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*Mark Wyndham*

## *1. Definitions and Issues*

Liberty is defined as the condition of not being subject to restriction or control and having the right to act in a manner of one's own choosing. Religious liberty, then, necessarily implies the personal freedom of the individual to avow or disavow whatever religious beliefs he so chooses without civil constraint. Religious liberty stands in immediate opposition to religious toleration, though the importance of the distinction may not be readily comprehensible in twentieth-century America, where religious freedom is taken for granted. The difference between religious liberty and toleration was well understood by the American colonists of the Revolutionary Era. Indeed, one may say that the *difference between liberty and toleration* was at the very core of the issue which eventually led to the forging of the First Amendment to the federal Constitution. That amendment states succinctly that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." As this paper will show, these words were aimed directly at the crucial difference between religious liberty and religious toleration.

The word toleration is seemingly innocent enough: a form of toleration is fundamental to the proper functioning of religious freedom. Must not every citizen under the Constitution commit himself to the toleration of his neighbor's right to differ in matters of religious belief? The term itself indicates an "official recognition" of the rights of individuals and groups to hold "dissenting" opinions. It especially implies the sufferance by a government of religious nonconformity.

It is precisely at this point, the idea of governmental sufferance (suggesting something not quite proper that must be endured), at which the American colonists directed their most forcible attacks. A political

system based on religious tolerance indicates that government maintains an official religion or church from which others are allowed to deviate or dissent. The basic problem with such a system—one of which the colonists were painfully aware—is that toleration is a two-edged sword: a government which tolerates dissent today may constrain dissent tomorrow. As long as there exists an official governmentally maintained church, there also exists {153} a threat to those who would disagree with that church, no matter how thoroughgoing the policy of toleration might seem. Toleration implies no absolute right of the individual to practice his faith; it implies merely the tenuous favor of official restraint from outright persecution.

Complete religious liberty was a radical concept in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Up to that time, the Western world had known virtually nothing but the twin-horned concept of toleration and persecution. When the framers of the American Constitution wrote the First Amendment, they were effectually breaking with a 5,000-year tradition. They completely understood the critical nature of this issue, but it might be well to cover briefly the historical background of the long struggle to achieve religious freedom for the benefit of readers who may have forgotten its importance.

## *2. Persecution and Toleration in Western Culture to the Eve of Colonization*

The history of religious toleration is only slightly older than that of true religious liberty. For most of the span of written history in the West prior to the sixteenth century, one may discover but few periods when religious toleration flourished. Persecution is by far the dominant theme in the history of Western religions.

### **The Ancient World**

In the most ancient Near East, each people had its own gods. City-states usually identified with the chief deity of their particular pantheon. When such states went to war, it was not merely city against city or people against people, but god against god. Defeat for the state usually meant the death or enslavement of its citizens and the demolition of its temples and cults. It is nearly a truism of ancient history that the gods of the vanquished (if remembered at all) became the demons and bogeys of the victors.

Later, in the Hellenistic period (c. 300 B.C.–A.D. 100), a new trend toward toleration of foreign deities emerged, first in the cities of Greece and then in the Roman Empire. The early Imperial Age of Rome (c. 50 B.C.–A.D. 150) is the first major period of widespread religious toleration in Western history. The Romans were truly cosmopolitan in outlook, extending toleration to virtually all legitimate cults throughout the empire with only relatively minor restrictions, for the most part, concerning the safety of public morality and the social order. This official policy of toleration encompassed even such wildly ecstatic fertility cults as those of the Near Eastern goddesses Cybele and the Mother Ma, with their eunuch priests and ritual bloodletting so completely in contrast to the somberness of the native Roman cults. The Jews, for example, hitherto suffering intermittent {154} persecutions at the hands of their Greek overlords, were allowed to travel throughout the empire, worshipping publicly and proselytizing freely.

It was in such a climate of toleration that the first Christians began to spread the message of Jesus. The book of Acts tells us that persecutions began almost immediately. But the first persecutions came out of Judaism and not from the Roman authorities. When the apostle Paul was taken into custody by the Romans, it was not due to his profession of Jesus as Messiah, but because he was considered a public nuisance and a threat to the peace. Upon his arrival in Rome, he was allowed to preach the gospel “openly and unhindered” while awaiting his trial. The earliest Christian missionaries spread the gospel throughout the empire with little or no molestation except when they aroused local hostilities. It was only after many such incidents of local disturbances that the Romans took serious notice of the new religion and began to distinguish it from Judaism. Official toleration was withdrawn from the Christians slowly and sporadically at first, with reference to specific incidents such as the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64 in Rome and that at Lyons in 177. The persecution of Christians probably did not achieve imperial proportions until the third century, with the greatest and most extensive persecution falling at the time of Diocletian and his successors at the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth.

The reasons why the Christians in particular were the only religious group of the period to merit such widespread persecution from an oth-

erwise tolerant government are many and varied. Perhaps the most important reason, at least for our purposes here, was the very lack of a sense of toleration among the Christians themselves. The earliest Christians were not arbitrarily set apart from their pagan neighbors by official decree or because the pagans were unwilling to tolerate the addition of one more deity to their already bulging pantheon; rather, the Christians withdrew themselves from fellowship with paganism, its cults, and its system of values, and, what is more, they gloried in it. It was primarily the refusal of the Christians to offer worship to the pagan gods (especially to the emperor as god) or even to acknowledge their existence—excepting only as evil demons—that provoked the final withdrawal of Roman toleration.

Thus, Roman paganism, far from being the citadel of general intolerance and persecution as it is so often portrayed, may be said to be the “philosophical” forebear of the secular ideal of toleration which developed in the so-called Enlightenment of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### **Intolerance in Earliest Christianity**

Many historians find in earliest Christianity itself the prime example of toleration and even of complete religious liberty. For example, Henry {155} Kaman (quoting Lord Acton), in his book, *The Rise of Toleration*, argues that “the church began with the principle of liberty, both as her claim and as her rule.” Kaman cites a number of scriptural references in support of his argument, including the famous “parable of the tares” (Matt 13: 24–30) and Paul’s statement that “there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor. 11:19). Kaman also quotes Titus 3:10, where heretics are to be warned twice and then expelled from the communion, suggesting that this was to be done in a spirit of love and therefore implied no intolerance.

But this is certainly not the case. The early Christians were as intolerant of heretical opinions as they were of paganism. The key phrase in Titus is that heretics—those who willfully argue to the spiritual detriment of the community—are to be “avoided” or “rejected” (the Greek *paraitou* means “to have done with” or to “deprecate”; the Latin translation, *deprecare*, means literally “to pray away”). In no sense does this passage imply that such persons are to be tolerated within the body of

the faithful. However, neither does it suggest that they are to be physically punished or persecuted. The *persecution* of dissenters *can be* a result of intolerance, but a fundamental principle of intolerance toward those harmful elements within the congregation does not of necessity imply the presence of a willingness to persecute those without.

Neither Jesus nor the apostles preached persecution of dissenters, but, nevertheless, it is clearly evident that the position of the New Testament church on heresies was one of basic and fundamental intolerance. And it is not at all surprising or contradictory that this should be so. Of all the peoples of the ancient Near East, the people of the Old Testament, the Jews, were among the most intolerant in religious matters. They were the chosen people of God—all other deities were rejected outright, as Exodus 20:2–6 makes clear. The way of God was made known to man through the written Word. There were not “truths,” but only the *Truth*, and the Jews, the people of the Book, were the preservers of that Truth. To deviate from the Truth, then, was by definition a sinful act and as such intolerable.

This is not to say that in Judaism all discussion of God’s Word was disallowed, but only that argumentativeness that tended to destructiveness. The Jews were far from perfect in their adherence to the original covenant—and their whoring after strange gods fills the pages of the Prophets. But all such straying from the path of Truth was inevitably and utterly condemned by those same Prophets.

This, then, was the principal heritage of earliest Christianity. The Christians became the new chosen people of God, agreeing to a new covenant of grace whereby they accepted God’s truth and defended it unilaterally against all assaults from paganism without and heresy within. {156} They did not persecute dissenters in the earliest congregations, but neither did they tolerate them. Contentious persons were allowed to remain with the faithful up to a point; when they moved beyond the acceptable limit of reasonable hope for reconciliation they were expelled, and their spiritual condemnation rested upon their own heads.

### **Church and State in the Middle Ages**

The intolerance of earliest Christianity was limited to the local body or congregation of believers. The history of persecution of dissenters begins as the church moves into legal partnership with the imperial

authority. When in 380 the emperor Theodosius I established Christianity as the *only* legitimate religion in the empire, he confirmed the policy of favoritism toward Christianity which Constantine had initiated nearly seventy years earlier in the now famous Edict of Milan. Interestingly enough, the edict of Theodosius did away with the first general statement of complete religious liberty in Western history, for Constantine's Edict of Milan, in placing Christianity on a par with paganism, had included the statement that "to each one's thought and desire should be given authority to practice divine things according to each individual preference ... that both to Christians and to non-Christians should be conceded the freedom to maintain the faith of their own sect." Not only did Theodosius overturn this statement of religious freedom, he effectually wiped out any form of toleration as well, substituting a systemized doctrine of intolerance and persecution. All who dissented from those doctrines officially designated as "Catholic" were considered "demented and insane" and were "to be smitten first by divine vengeance, then also by the punishment of our authority, which we have claimed in accordance with the celestial will."

The significance of this statement of imperial policy cannot be overestimated. The control of dissenters had been withdrawn from the local congregations and placed ultimately in the hands of the secular authorities. The Christian Church had become literally a ward of the State, a combination which commonly goes by the name of Caesaropapism. Jesus taught His disciples to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," seeming to imply a separation between Church and State. After 380, such a separation was out of the question. The State now claimed to rule over the Church on earth; the Church itself had ceased to be a number of self-ordered congregations and had become, by imperial edict, an all-inclusive church.

Henry Kaman observed that "the basis of intolerance in the Middle Ages was the alliance between Church and State. The Church on its side taught patient subjection to the powers of the world, and the State stepped in to eradicate religious heterodoxy wherever it reared its head." This statement is, as we have seen, only partially correct. The basis of Christian {157} intolerance is scriptural, relating to congregations of Christians, and implies neither political intolerance nor persecution. This limited intolerance, designed to preserve the Truth

necessary to salvation, was twisted and perverted in the matrix of the fourth century and passed into the Middle Ages as a universal religious-political intolerance hardly separable in meaning from persecution and death for dissent. By the end of the twelfth century, the secular authorities and the papacy were fully determined to annihilate all forms of dissent by sword and pyre. With this objective set, the Papal Inquisition began its operations of ferreting out heretics all over Europe in the 1230s.

Throughout the later Middle Ages, the papal theory of the Church-State alliance predominated. Stated briefly, this theory asserts that God gave two swords to the rulers of men, one spiritual and the other temporal, and that the spiritual should hold sway over the temporal. In other words, the governor of the Christian Church on earth—i.e., the pope—was God's vice-regent in control of all spiritual matters, including the eternal life or death of individual souls. Temporal authorities—i.e., kings, emperors, etc.—ruled over only the physical bodies and material possessions of their subjects, subordinate to the spiritual overlordship and guidance of the pope and his bishops. The caesaropapism of the later Roman Empire had been functionally reversed by this papal theory of suzerainty over spiritual *and* temporal affairs.

It was basically this *Church-State alliance* that allowed the medieval church to persecute all types of heresies and yet abstain from the actual shedding of blood. The papal inquisitors *tried* the suspected heretics and, if they judged them guilty, *released them to the secular authorities*, whose duty it was (under this peculiar arrangement) to inflict the suitable punishment, whether it be confiscation of property, fine, imprisonment, or death at the stake.

### **Toleration and Persecution in Reformation Europe**

The system of careful cooperation between Church and State was not fundamentally altered by the advent of the *neo-caesaropapism* of the sixteenth century, commonly known as *Erastianism*. Erastianism theoretically re-inverted the order of predominance in the Church-State alliance and fragmented it, giving to each secular prince the overlordship of the church in his realm. The secular lord once again controlled the spiritual destiny of his subjects.

Thus, in those areas of Europe profoundly touched by Reformation ideas, state episcopacies were everywhere formed in open defiance of

papal authority. This system of state-controlled churches found its way into the peace settlement of Augsburg in 1555 between Catholics and Protestants. That agreement stipulated that the secular ruler of each territory had the {158} right to determine the religion of that territory (as long as it were either Roman Catholicism or Lutheranism—Calvinism was added to the list at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648). The principle *cuis regio, eius religio*—whose the region, his the religion—became the order of Western society.

But this is neither religious liberty nor toleration; it is merely the fragmentation of the old principle of the caesars, the reduction of a universal control by an emperor (or pope) to segmental control by territorial princes. If a Lutheran lived in a territory ruled by a Catholic prince, he was given the choice of surrendering either his faith or his home. The same choice held true for a Catholic living in a Lutheran territory. The Protestant rulers, on the whole, were only somewhat less zealous than their Catholic counterparts in doing to death the heretics found in their realms—possibly because they lacked the centralized and extremely efficient inquisitorial machine available to the Catholic princes.

There were a number of scholars and religious leaders on both sides who deeply regretted the persecution of persons for religious dissent, especially in matters of dogma, which in some cases had never been precisely defined or were, in their view, of only secondary importance with regard to the salvation of souls. This school of thought is known as *irenicism*, the seeking of conciliation between the warring parties in terms of compromise theology. The irenicists, led by such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, believed that only *a few fundamental doctrines* were absolutely necessary to salvation and that all others could be compromised in the interests of peace and harmony. Reunion of Christendom under one banner was their goal. They detested persecution and torture as means of compelling dissenters to reenter the fold, and they favored a policy of good will and conciliation which they believed would slowly but surely achieve the same end.

The irenicists thus preached a type of toleration in a wilderness of intolerance, but their object of reuniting Christendom proved to be impractical and even utopian as the sixteenth century wore to a close. Among the few secular lords to attempt to institute the irenic form of



toleration was Philip, the Landgrave of Hesse. Philip was a supporter of the Lutheran cause, but he could not condone the use of violence against dissenters in purely religious matters. He was ready and willing to resort to force, but only if a person's religious activities resulted in social disorder (a policy in fact very similar to that of the Roman emperors). For example, Philip was a leader of the military suppression of the peasants at Frankenhausen in 1525, a religio-social uprising, and yet at the same time he provided a haven for the much maligned Anabaptists in his territories as long as they did not disturb the civil peace.

Most of the religious reformers of the sixteenth century—men such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin—were in many ways men of the age. Where they might differ in matters of dogma and church order, they agreed to a {159} man that heresy and social upheaval went hand in hand and were indeed two functions of the same Satanic phenomenon. To tolerate religious deviance was to invite social disorder and in the end the destruction of everything they hoped to achieve. The alliance between the Church and State was for most of these men a necessity—for the Truth to survive it must be protected, and the protector must be of the same creed.

John Calvin differed to some degree from many other reformers in that he preached a form of quasi-independence of the Church from State control. In Calvin's Geneva the ministry, for the most part, ruled on matters of doctrine in the Consistory, and political affairs were determined in the city council. But lay persons also sat in the Consistory, and ministers exercised police authority over the morals of the citizens, whether or not they were church members, and they also had considerable influence in the city's political affairs. Thus, although the Church and State were nominally separated by constitutional decree, the cooperation of the two was so close as to negate any potential benefit in the area of religious toleration. The term *theocracy* is often misapplied to Calvin's Geneva, and the city served as a model of what its rulers would have considered a righteous intolerance.

The case for intolerance in support of orthodoxy was strongly rooted in the sixteenth century. The Roman Church pointed to the complex diversity of doctrines and sects—all promoting social discord—in Protestantism, while Protestants hurled epithets back at Catholics and also at radical left-wing Protestant sects such as the Anabaptists (a

group of Anabaptists took over the town of Muenster and imposed a form of social communism, including polygamy for the leader, John of Leiden). The term “Anabaptist” was as fearful to the Reformers of the sixteenth century as the term “Communist” was in the United States in the early 1950s.

This, then, was the situation in Western Europe in the sixteenth century—intolerance was the rule, and the age-old alliance between Church and State, although fragmented to the territorial level, seemed as strong as ever. In England, the State-Church alliance was to some degree more fluid. There was the continual switching from Roman Catholicism to Tudor Catholicism under Henry VIII, to a more Protestant system under Edward VI, back to a stern Romanism under Mary, and eventually to the Anglican settlement under Elizabeth. Elizabeth felt very keenly the precariousness of the religious and social situation, and thus her own position, and sought somehow to bind the wounds caused over the previous half-century. In her first few years as queen she made bishops of men from several religious camps—men who favored an English Catholicism (without the pope), as well as men who leaned toward Lutheranism and Calvinism. In the end her own peculiar brand of irenicism resulted in the fomenting of further religious and social discontent. The English Church {160} was still thoroughly tied to the English crown and was tolerant of dissent only when expedient. Roman Catholics, for example, were subjected to various forms of restraint and even outright persecution on occasion (the martyrologist John Foxe was one of the few Reformed Christians to speak out against such treatment toward Catholics).

Under James I, Catholics were somewhat better treated, but other groups, seeking to work within the English Church to change and purify it of its abuses, came under increasingly heavy fire. These groups were known collectively as Puritans, although each group had its own opinions concerning church polity and the relationship of Church to State.

Among the Puritans were such men as Robert Browne, whose followers later came to be known as Brownists and Separatists, and John Winthrop, who would lead a group of coreligionists to Massachusetts Bay. In viewing the efforts of these two men to reform the Church of England, we arrive at the eve of American colonization. England under

the early Stuarts was becoming increasingly hostile to Reformed ideas, and the prospect of winning major concessions from the crown seemed to grow more and more remote, forcing many Puritans to the conclusion that migration to the New World was their only hope.

### ***3. The Issue of Religious Liberty in the American Colonies to 1750***

Among the many groups of religious refugees fleeing the intolerance of England for America were Separatist Pilgrims, Quakers, and what the historian Perry Miller has termed the “Non-separating Congregationalists.” They came to America primarily to begin a new life for themselves where they could worship God in the manner of their own choosing. But did they bring with them the principle of religious liberty?

#### **The Pilgrims and Plymouth Colony**

The Separatist Pilgrims who settled Plymouth believed in a church polity which left to individual congregations such matters as the church covenant, membership qualifications, and election of officers. Each congregation was, in their view, autonomous and unrestricted by any outside governing body, such as a regional synod of ministers, or bishops controlled by constitutional ties (as in Presbyterianism), or by officials of the crown (as in Anglicanism). They were to be completely independent of both ecclesiastical and political authority.

The Separatist format seems close in many ways to both first-century Christianity and to the Church-State arrangement in America today—each self-governing congregation having the right to determine its own affairs without outside interference. However, it is probable that the Pilgrims, while yet in their Dutch refuge of Leiden, had not fully considered what life in the harsh isolation of the New World would mean. Landing in a territory {161} outside the area designated for them in their patent agreement, they were left to begin Plymouth colony in tenuous control of their own political and religious destiny. The famous Mayflower Compact, drawn up even before disembarkation, was designed as a blueprint for running the new community. The compact effectually guaranteed political control to the Pilgrims, even though they were but a minority of the total number of colonists. The majority of settlers had come for economic or political reasons and did

not own membership in the Pilgrim church. Suddenly, then, the Pilgrims, who wished to flee intolerance in England and to follow the biblical precept of separating themselves from the ungodly, found themselves holding political sway over a majority of persons who did not share their religious views. Fearful of risking the purity of their faith, they admitted only their own members to religious services, leaving the rest of the population without benefit of clergy. When in 1624 an Anglican minister named John Lyford arrived to tend the needs of those outside the Pilgrim fold, he incurred the wrath of Governor William Bradford and was expelled from the colony on the grounds that he was a threat to the social stability of the community.

The Pilgrims also had difficulty regulating the morals of those outside their communion. It became a criminal offense for anyone to act against the best interests of the church covenant. Moral offenses were liberally interpreted and ran the gamut from engaging overly much in sporting activities to stealing pigs. There were also problems within the Pilgrim congregation. Beginning in the early 1630s, some colonists desired to move away from Plymouth village and start new villages. They also desired churches of their own, albeit Pilgrim, but separate from the church at Plymouth. After much debate, and over the expressed concern of Bradford, the new villages and the new churches were officially mandated in the Great Fundamentals of 1636.

Plymouth Colony has come down in history as a model of early democracy in America, but this is debatable. While it is true that no “proof” of church membership was required to become a freeman and enjoy political suffrage, it was necessary to supply testimony to a “true belief” in God, and relatively few men outside the Pilgrim congregations managed to achieve the status of freeman in the seventeenth century. Also, the suffrage was denied to all those who confessed opposition to the trained clergy. This last was aimed primarily at the Quakers, who began to arrive in the 1650s. During the 1660s the Quakers were outlawed in Plymouth Colony and were actively pursued by the authorities.

In Plymouth Colony, Church and State collaborated fully, and toleration of other religious views was limited. But religious liberty for all was never a part of Pilgrim philosophy. Like most religious groups of the age, they felt their truth to be the Truth and were desirous of pro-

protecting it. Originally {162} favoring a disassociation of Church and State, they were forced by the circumstances of life in America to modify this principle in order to keep their church pure. Pilgrim Church and Pilgrim State formed a working partnership to enforce a basic intolerance to those religious opinions considered hostile to Pilgrim orthodoxy.

Plymouth Colony became a part of Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1690, and all the evidence indicates that the transition was a smooth one with little or no change in the political or religious structure.

### **Massachusetts Bay and Non-Separating Congregationalism**

The second group in our discussion is the Puritan colony of Massachusetts Bay. Settled in 1630 with a charter from the crown, this colony began in rather a spectacular fashion. Hundreds and then thousands of colonists arrived in the first decade, most of whom were Non-separating Congregationalists. They differed from the Presbyterians, on the one hand, in maintaining a distinct congregational approach to church polity, decrying Presbyterianism as little better than popery, and on the other hand, refusing to condone the view of the Separatists that the Church of England was entirely made up of reprobates who should be shunned.

The basic incongruity of a Non-separating Congregational Puritanism trying to subsist within the Church of England posed no end of difficulties for these stalwart men and women. Finally, many, including John Winthrop, realized that their only course of action was to deport to the New World. In founding Massachusetts Bay, they sought to establish a society of the godly which would serve as a model—a city on a hill—for their disbelieving brethren in England. In no way did they wish to establish a colony where liberty of conscience would flourish. They had little complaint concerning the establishment of an alliance between Church and State and sought merely to assure that the State, whether in England or Massachusetts Bay, protected the proper Church, that is, the Church properly reformed and consisting of “visible saints” according to the precepts of Non-separating Congregationalism.

The religio-political system of Massachusetts Bay perpetuated the basic intolerance then prevalent in England and on the Continent. After 1631, only church members were theoretically allowed the fran-

chise—though in fact town elections were quite democratic—and (in contrast to Plymouth Colony) only those who could satisfactorily verify personal salvation were admitted to full church membership. This course of action was considered necessary by the Puritan leaders “in case worldly men should prove the major part, as soon they might do, they would as readily set over us magistrates like themselves such as might turn the edge of all authority and laws against the church and the members thereof.”

This fear that religious deviance posed a serious threat to the social {163} order was precisely the same as that expressed by the Anglican Archbishop Laud in his diatribes against the Puritans in England. As long as such fears were dominant, the development of a true principle of religious toleration was improbable and one of religious liberty impossible.

This is not to say that the Church ran the State in Massachusetts Bay. On the contrary, ministers were relegated to church affairs only and were not allowed to hold political office. Conversely, political officials, though church members, were not permitted to interfere in matters of religious doctrine. Nevertheless, the State was expected to deal with dissenters and other troublemakers, and the “moral” advice of the clergy carried considerable weight in political affairs. The politics of Massachusetts Bay rested soundly on a religious base.

The Church-State alliance remained strong in Massachusetts Bay even after 1689, when religious toleration was made part of the law of England. Although this law probably provided less liberty in matters of conscience than previously believed, it did set certain limits beyond which even the magistracy of far-off Massachusetts Bay dared not pass. After 1689 it was not legally possible to banish or otherwise subject to penal restrictions members of *suitably registered* Protestant sects. The edict did not, however, provide for anything more than a basic toleration of recognized Protestant sects within the body politic—Catholics and “renegade” Protestants could still be legitimately excluded. Religious tests for the franchise and for holding public office were unaffected, as was the basic alliance between Church and State.

Nonetheless, the first meaningful chink in the armor of the State-Church establishment was opened. It was not out of “orthodox” Puritanism that the principle of complete religious liberty arose, but rather

from the more radical left wing of Puritanism—sects such as the Quakers and Baptists. It was primarily through the efforts of such groups to achieve parity in those colonies maintaining State-Church establishments that the ideal of religious freedom was initially formulated in America.

### **Pennsylvania and the Quakers**

The Quakers were a radical party of Puritanism first begun by the Englishman George Fox. Fox started the Society of Friends on the premise that dependence on the organized priesthood and/or reliance on Scripture were in error; divine illumination of the spirit was the only true voice of God. The Quakers quickly became one of the most vocal and hated of sects. Many rushed into persecution, only too willing to suffer punishment and even death for their faith. The first Quakers arrived in the American colonies in the 1650s and immediately ran afoul of the governmental authorities. In Massachusetts Bay they were particularly virulent, drawn possibly by the stringent laws soon put into effect against them. {164} Finally, when it became clear that banishments and beatings were having no effect on these intransigents, the magistrates felt forced to resort to the death penalty, executing two Quakers in 1659.

But in William Penn the Quakers found a protector. In discharging an old debt to the elder Penn, the king granted to William proprietary rights to the colony named after him, Pennsylvania. One of the cornerstones upon which that colony was founded was religious liberty. Penn denounced persecution in his writings with the argument that “force never yet made either a good Christian or a good subject.” It was his purpose in America to set up a haven where the religiously oppressed could settle and worship in peace.

The Great Experiment, as it was called, proved highly successful at its inception in 1681 and attracted numerous settlers, mostly Quakers who quickly gained political control of the colony, but also Baptists, Mennonites, and even Catholics and Jews. Yet this initial success was not allowed to last undiminished. Penn, despite his protests, was soon forced by the crown to accept certain reservations. All non-Christians were disenfranchised and prohibited from holding political office. Later, Catholics were also restricted from political office. The Quakers themselves seemed for awhile to forget their proclaimed mission and

jealously guarded their entrenched rights in Pennsylvania government until the late eighteenth century, when they evidently took stock of their “backslidden condition” and slowly relinquished the political controls.

But the importance of Penn’s Great Experiment lies in the fact that it proved that people of varying religious persuasions could live together and prosper in a state where religious freedom was the rule. At the time of the American Revolution, Pennsylvania was the most prosperous of all the colonies. William Penn was one of the few major figures in seventeenth-century politics openly to pronounce in favor of complete liberty of conscience, ranking ahead of the Catholic Lord Baltimore (who enunciated no general principles of religious liberty) and on a par with Roger Williams, the first great exponent of religious freedom in England or America.

### **Rhode Island: Roger Williams and the Baptists**

The history of the Baptists (both Particular and General) cannot be separated from Roger Williams and Rhode Island. Williams, forced to leave his ministry at Salem in 1636, spent two years wandering and preaching among the Indians and finally settled with a small group of followers near the head of Narragansett Bay. The settlers signed a compact submitting themselves “to all such orders or agreements as shall be made for the public good of the body, in an orderly way ... only in *civil things*.” As Williams stated, the new settlement was to provide a “shelter for persons distressed for conscience.” {165}

In 1644, the colony of Rhode Island was officially instituted by patent from the king. The preamble to its constitution guarantees that “all men may walk as their consciences persuade them, everyone in the name of his God.” Rhode Island was the only colony to maintain such a general principle of religious liberty intact throughout the colonial period.

Roger Williams himself was to move from Congregational Puritanism to help formulate the first Baptist creed in the colonies in 1639, and finally ended by denying the legitimacy of all orders of church polity, becoming what has been termed a “seeker.” He did not relinquish his entire heritage, however; he continued to believe firmly in the divine authority of the Scriptures, battling to his dying day against the “illumination” of the Quakers. Despite his disagreement with Quaker beliefs,



Williams continued to welcome Quakers and all other non-conformists to the new colony.

The Baptists as well as the Quakers got an early toehold in Rhode Island. Both groups sought early to move into the nearby colonies of Plymouth, Connecticut, and Massachusetts Bay. The Baptists, though more successful than the Quakers, met stern resistance and even persecution in Massachusetts Bay, but were received, albeit grudgingly, in Plymouth, and they achieved great success in Connecticut. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, Massachusetts Bay was ranked second only to Rhode Island in the number of Baptist churches. Baptists, like the Quakers, seemed to thrive on persecution. But the passage of the Act of Toleration in 1689 no doubt greatly aided their migration.

On the eve of the American Revolution, despite the presence on the statute books of the Act of Toleration, most of the colonies (excepting only Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and Delaware) continued to maintain some form of public support for specific churches. In many (Virginia, Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, Maryland, and New Hampshire), state churches were still formally established and nourished by mandatory taxation.

#### *4. Religious Liberty and the American Revolution*

As we have seen, the prevailing sentiment of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries favored religious intolerance maintained by a tight Church-State alliance. Religious nonconformists were identified as politico-social incendiaries and were often punished for civil crimes when their chief offense was religious deviance. Slowly, events in England had worked to change the formula of the Church-State alliance to allow for a grudging form of toleration. The Act of 1689 set this somewhat limited principle of toleration into English law. As a result, some of the more intolerant American colonies, such as Massachusetts Bay, were forced to concede certain basic rights to religious dissenters. At the same time, in some of the more liberalized colonies, such as Pennsylvania, religious liberty was curtailed. On the whole, however, it would seem that most religious nonconformists {166} were better off in a legal sense at the end of the seventeenth century than they had been at the beginning.

As pointed out earlier, religious toleration is by no means the same thing as religious freedom. What existed in most colonies prior to the Revolution was merely a form of *constrained intolerance*. Protestant groups benefited most, while Catholics and non-Christians suffered most; the franchise could be and was withheld on the basis of religious tests, as was the right to hold office; state churches demanded tax monies from unregistered dissenters as well as from their own members. All that a religious nonconformist could legally expect from the magistracy in Massachusetts Bay, for example, was the right to worship “privately” in relative peace.

### **The Struggle Against Episcopacy and Parliamentary Interference**

This is where the issue might have rested, perhaps indefinitely, but for a series of events which began in the 1750s regarding the rumored intent of Parliament to establish Anglican bishops in the colonies. Since the beginning of the colonization process, there had been no bishops for the Church of England in America, not even in Virginia, where Anglicanism was most thoroughly established. Then, quite suddenly it seemed, in the period just prior to the outbreak of the War for Independence, with politics in a turmoil and relations with England increasingly strained, suspicions were aroused that Anglican bishops were about to be settled in the colonies, especially in Massachusetts Bay, possibly to be supported by a general tax. Fears of renewed intolerance similar to that which the colonists had originally fled England to escape were revived. The colonists responded with a tremendous outpouring of anti-episcopal literature in newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel picked this particular time to send a “mission to the Indians” of Massachusetts Bay. Unfortunately, the headquarters for the missionary activity was located not in a modest building near a wilderness area, but in an opulent mansion within a stone’s throw of Harvard College in Cambridge. Many felt that the elegance of the place was proof that it was to be a bishop’s residence. The Society’s selection of East Apthorp to head the mission was also unfortunate, for he was a particularly vain and obstreperous man and quite vocal in stating his disdain for “nonconformity” in Massachusetts Bay, meaning the Puritan orthodoxy. Apthorp made it known that he considered his mission to “the natives, Africans, and heathens” to

include the nonconformists as well, whom he equated with “popery and Mohammedanism.” Apthorp was certainly not a bishop, but many feared that it was only a matter of time before either he was ordained a bishop or one would arrive to take his place. With the arrival of a bishop, the dominant position of {167} Puritanism would be seriously and perhaps fatally undermined.

On the other side, the arguments in favor of establishing bishops in the colonies also seemed strong. There were perhaps three hundred thousand Anglicans living in the colonies (many in Massachusetts Bay) without benefit of the higher clergy necessary for such things as ordination, confirmation, and general supervision of the Church’s affairs. The system then in effect rested control with the bishop of London, who delegated supervisory powers to *commissaries* residing in the colonies. But this system was not entirely satisfactory, since such officers were outside church law and could not ordain ministers, who still had to make the long arduous journey to England for that service. Many Anglicans argued that the ruling nonconformists (especially in Massachusetts Bay) were oppressing the established Church of England by not allowing bishops to minister in the colonies.

Whether or not there really existed a concerted plot by Parliament to strengthen its control in the colonies by establishing Anglican bishops in troubled areas such as Massachusetts Bay is still debatable, but it is certain that many colonists truly believed in its existence. The substance of the controversy was probably more political than religious: the leaders of Massachusetts Bay did not want to lose their privileged position, to return from political authority once again to the level of a mere tolerated dissenting faction, perhaps forced to contribute money to the “established” Church—this they could not tolerate. As John Adams reflected many years after the controversy, there was

spread an universal alarm against the authority of Parliament. It excited a general and just apprehension that bishops, and dioceses and churches, and priests, and tithes, were to be imposed on us by Parliament. It was known that neither King, nor ministry, nor archbishops could appoint bishops in America without an Act of Parliament; and if Parliament could tax us, they could establish the Church of England ... and prohibit all other churches, as conventicles and schism shops.

In Virginia, where the Anglican Church was firmly established, the controversy took a somewhat different turn. There, too, many of the colony's leaders feared the sending of bishops into their midst. Virginia's House of Burgesses was accustomed to overseeing the affairs of the Church and resented what appeared to be a parliamentary attempt to usurp that authority. In the words of Richard Bland, a leader of the Burgesses, "if this scheme had been effected, it would have overturned all the acts of Assembly relative to ecclesiastical jurisdiction which have existed among us almost from the first establishment of the Colony. Our whole ecclesiastical constitution, which has been fixed by the King's assent, must be altered if a Bishop is appointed in America with any jurisdiction at all."

But the issue of bishops as such took a back seat to the issue of direct {168} parliamentary interference in the Burgesses' control of the Church of Virginia. The controversy surrounded an act of the House of Burgesses to limit clerical salaries; it was called the *Two-Penny Act*. For years, clerical salaries had been fixed in terms of payment in tobacco—a clergyman received a certain weight of tobacco or a comparable direct cash payment at the rate of exchange, i.e., two pennies per pound. In 1755, after a severe drop in the tobacco yield, the market value soared to seven pence per pound. The Burgesses passed the *Two-Penny Act*, hoping to help the planters. This act limited the clerical exchange rate at the old figure of two pence per pound, and the outraged clergy took the issue to the king, who promptly disallowed it. Then began a series of court cases in Virginia, called *Parsons' Cause cases*, wherein the clergy attempted to redeem what they considered their rightful lost income. The most famous of these cases involved Patrick Henry as counsel for the defense. Henry based his argument on an abstract principle of the reciprocal duties of the king and his subjects. He stated that the king had violated his duty to his distressed subjects in finding for the Anglican clergy, and that thereby the "political compact" between subjects and king was dissolved, and the *Two-Penny Act* should stand. This was the first general statement of the principle upon which the colonies would base their argument for independence some twenty years later. In the end, the court found for the plaintiff, but only in the amount of "one penny"—in fact a moral victory for the defense. The colonists were making it clear to Parliament and the king

that their own political organ, the House of Burgesses, was to determine how much should be paid for clerical duties in Virginia.

Thus, the issue of religious liberty in the decades prior to 1776 assumed a number of different forms, but always the heart of the issue was *parliamentary interference in the internal affairs of the colonies*. The terms “liberty of conscience” and “freedom of religion” came increasingly to the forefront. But even as the political and religious leaders in the colonies chanted these slogans in defiance of the parliamentary threat of episcopacy and taxation, they continued to maintain support for their own established churches and their own right to levy taxes on nonconformists. This rather incongruous situation was brought forcibly to their attention mainly by three groups of dissenters—the Separatist Baptists, the Strict Congregationalists, and the New Light Presbyterians. It is their struggle for complete religious liberty and the elimination of all forms of so-called “toleration” through State-Church alliances that eventually led to the passage of the First Amendment. Again, Virginia and Massachusetts draw our attention.

### **The Internal Struggle for Religious Liberty**

In the 1750s, Virginia was set upon by waves of nonconformists, {169} mostly Separatist Baptists and New Lights. In 1769, a committee of religion was set up to formulate a new act of toleration to deal with the problem. But the resulting legislation was even more restricting than previous statutes. Dissenters were to be prohibited from proselytizing and their meetings licensed for daylight hours only. The nonconformists protested so vehemently that social upheaval seemed imminent, and the Burgesses were forced to suspend the measure. Finally, in 1776, the House of Burgesses, led by James Madison, passed the now famous *Virginia Declaration of Rights*, which states that religion “can be directed only by reason and conviction” and that “all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience.”

This Declaration did not disestablish the Anglican Church, but it was a major step in that direction. It was to take ten more years and still more debate before the *Act for Establishing Religious Freedom* accomplished that feat. It is important to note that complete religious freedom in Virginia came long after the Declaration of (Civil) Independence from Britain, and that most of the effort to achieve that

principle came from the nonconformist Separatist Baptists, New Light Presbyterians, and Strict Congregationalists. Many historians have argued that religious liberty in Virginia was a product of Enlightenment idealism, propounded by men such as Madison and Jefferson; indeed, the language of the legislative measures seems to suggest as much. But it is highly debatable whether, without the incessant pressure of the Protestant nonconformists, Enlightenment thought alone could have carried the field. Madison himself later confessed to having been much influenced by the nonconformists' arguments.

Thus it was that religious freedom came to Virginia a full decade after the right to civil liberty for all the American colonies was proclaimed in 1776. In Massachusetts the wait was to be even longer, for although the official antiestablishment protestations against the Church of England were louder there than anywhere else, pleas for liberty of conscience by its own nonconformists were consistently rejected by the ruling orthodoxy.

Most of the magistrates professed not to comprehend the problem, pointing out that toleration of dissenting factions was considerably more liberal in Massachusetts than in England. And it was true that no registered nonconformist was forced to attend any other than his own church, nor was he taxed to support the established church. But many Separatist Baptists and New Lights utterly rejected the principle that the Massachusetts magistrates had the right to determine which groups were "regular" enough to merit the favor of being allowed to register for toleration. Many such groups refused to register; as a result, they were not recognized as legitimate dissenters, and taxes were subsequently levied on them for support of the established church.

One of the most famous pre-Revolutionary disputes over this issue arose {170} in the hamlet of Ashfield, originally settled by Baptists. The Baptists claimed that later settlers belonging to the "orthodox" faith had eventually out-voted them in the town meeting and had taken over the town government. Immediately, the orthodox council had levied a tax for support of the clergy—orthodox clergy—a tax which the Baptists refused to pay, with the result that their property was declared confiscated. The Ashfield Baptists took their case all the way to the king, who, being no friend to the Massachusetts brand of orthodoxy, ruled in their favor.

Although the Ashfield case was not an isolated incident, and though many forceful writers of the day spoke up for the cause of disestablishment and complete religious liberty, the Church-State alliance in Massachusetts was not sundered until 1833, when complete religious liberty became a part of the state constitution.

### 5. Conclusions

This paper has briefly surveyed the history of toleration and persecution in Western culture as background to the proclamation of true religious liberty in America with the passage of the First Amendment to the federal Constitution in 1791. It is important to note, however, that the First Amendment did not end all forms of religious intolerance in the United States. It merely prohibited the *federal* Congress from passing laws regarding the establishment of religion (Article Six had already prohibited religious tests for federal offices).

As we have seen, some states continued to maintain established churches long after the Constitution and its Bill of Rights went into effect. New Hampshire and Connecticut followed Massachusetts in maintaining their state churches, and Vermont was later to become the only state not of the original thirteen to enter the union with an established church. In several states Roman Catholics continued to suffer legal disabilities with regard to enfranchisement and state office holding.

Nevertheless, by 1791 the trend toward complete liberty of conscience in the United States was firmly established. With the principle of religious freedom set into the federal Constitution (and most state constitutions), individual congregations could once again decide their own affairs without threat of outside interference.

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# THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: TYPICAL OR UNIQUE?

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*Edward Coleson*

If there has been any one misunderstanding, more than any other, which has contributed to the bankruptcy of our global leadership in the last fifty or sixty years, it has been our failure to see the uniqueness of the American Revolution. We have flunked our own history. We have naively assumed that almost any nation can establish a viable democracy by simply setting up some ballot boxes out in the villages and having free elections. As a people, we know so little history that we have not perceived that the American experience is anomalous and could not be easily duplicated—that if country X, Y, or Z should drive out its present dictator, the people would have a worse tyrant by tomorrow morning. We are slowly learning this the hard way, but we could have avoided a number of tragic blunders across the world over the last few decades, if we had known this from the beginning.

Certainly there was no reason for the Christian community to fall for the popular delusions of our time. All one has to do is to read his Old Testament to get a proper perspective on politics as “the art of the possible.” Kings and Chronicles are filled with accounts of revolutions and assassinations. *Coup d’ états* with a carnival of slaughter were a regular feature of Israelitish politics from the division of the kingdom, following the death of Solomon, to the conquest and deportation of what we have since called the Ten Lost Tribes. During this period of just over two centuries (c. 930 B.C. to 722 B.C.), the northern kingdom had twenty kings who belonged to ten different dynasties, or an average of two rulers per family. But not everyone who tried to seize the throne succeeded. Take Zimri, for instance (1 Kings 16:8–20): he, “captain of half the chariots,” conspired against his master and smote him while His Majesty was “drinking himself drunk.” Zimri then “slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not one ..., neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends.” But Zimri’s reign lasted only seven days. Omri, the father

of Ahab, declared war on the new king and besieged him in his capital. When it was obvious to Zimri that all was lost, he burned down the palace over his own head and died. Omri then had to defeat another aspirant to the throne before he settled down to a reign of a dozen years. What happened to Queen Jezebel, Ahab's wife, and also his seventy sons at the hand of General Jehu nearly forty-five years later is perhaps better known and is also typical of their time and too much of {173} world history. This we could have known, if we had not skipped over the gory details as irrelevant, allowing us to get over to the "love chapter" in first Corinthians. Love is in the Bible, but so is the fact that the human "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). The Bible used to be the poor man's history, when the Good Book was almost the total library of ordinary people and was read with care. There are some silly notions which will not be a pitfall to men steeped in the Word of God.

Unfortunately, the scraps of history we do know are frequently wrong. One would conclude from a lot of present-day propaganda that the Greeks invented democracy and lived happily ever after. It should be evident to anyone who takes the trouble to examine the record that Greek history could be used more realistically to prove that democracy is an impractical and unworkable ideal. Alexander Hamilton, writing in *The Continentalist*, which was a "precursor" to the *Federalist*, made this point very strongly:

No friend to order or to rational liberty, can read without pain and disgust, the history of the Commonwealths of Greece. Generally speaking, they were a constant scene of the alternate tyranny of one part of the people over the other, or of a few usurping demagogues over the whole. Most of them had been originally governed by kings, whose despotism (the natural disease of monarchy) had obliged their subjects to murder, expel, depose, or reduce them to a nominal existence, and institute popular governments. In these governments, that of Sparta excepted, the jealousy of power hindered the people from trusting out of their own hands a competent authority, to maintain the repose and stability of the commonwealth; whence originated the frequent revolutions and civil broils, with which they were distracted. This, and the want of a solid federal union to restrain the ambition and rivalry of the different cities, after a rapid succession of bloody wars, ended in their total loss of liberty, and subjugation to foreign powers.<sup>452</sup>

If the men who fought our Revolution and later started this nation had little respect for the Greeks as practical politicians, they were deeply impressed with the Romans of the early Republic. The Romans, you recall, drove out the last of their kings, a despot named Tarquin, about 510 B.C. and established a stable government which functioned quiet well for centuries. Their example impressed our Founding Fathers very deeply. The extent of their influence may be judged by the fact that George Washington and his officers started a fraternal organization which they called the "Society of the Cincinnati." This officers' club was named for Cincinnatus, an early Roman who left his plow, saved the city, and returned to his farm work in sixteen days. As a popular leader with a victorious army, he did not yield to the temptation to make himself king. During the chaotic days {174} after the American Revolution, George Washington was urged to seize power and straighten out the country. This suggestion he rejected with scorn and severely reprimanded the tempter, one of his officers. One wonders what our history might have been if we had started off with a military dictator and all that goes along with this system. Unfortunately, at the present time few of my fellow Americans are acquainted with Cincinnatus and the other Roman stalwarts who were an inspiration to our Founding Fathers.

Now it would be a little ridiculous for me to insist that early Americans were virtuous simply because they read little folk tales about the honest and upright Romans who lived during the better days of the Republic. People are not reformed that easily. The attraction of our Fathers for the best that Rome had to offer was because this was the ideal that they themselves admired. In admiring the noble character of others and teaching these moralistic stories to their children, they helped to encourage the growth of the qualities which they approved. I feel rather strongly about the neglect of this wholesome tradition, since I learned about Cincinnatus and others like him in the early elementary grades (a few years later our children were brought up on Dick and Jane). However, the foundation of the American character two centuries ago was not Roman but Christian.

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452. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1904), 29-30 and 140-41.

It has been customary in the recent era of historical debunking to picture our early American patriots as deep-dyed villains, more interested in their personal economic advantage than in the welfare of the new nation. The gross economic determinism of Charles Beard has been refuted by Robert Brown<sup>453</sup> and Forrest McDonald.<sup>454</sup> In recent years, there have also been attempts to rehabilitate the reputations of our early leaders. Williamson<sup>455</sup> insists that in 1787, “the majority ... of the delegates at the Philadelphia Convention were committed Christians and that practically all the rest were Deists.” He then reminds us that Deists also believed that “God rules the world”; that morality is a by-product of religion and is a necessary foundation for good government, certainly the kind they were trying to launch. It is true, too, as Singer<sup>456</sup> tells us, that the men who wrote the Constitution were not the same group who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776 (only eight were involved in both). The latter gathering was more conservative and subdued. Nevertheless, both groups drew {175} their political support from Christian voters. There was a lot of good sense and solid character in our early leadership, both of the Revolution and the founding of this nation. It is easy to take some rascal like Gouverneur Morris, who was cynical and immoral, and let him represent the whole. Yet, strangely, Morris was most emphatic in his support of Christianity: he warned of the “ruin to every state that rejects the precepts of religion.”<sup>457</sup> It is not necessary to assume that he was insincere in his statements. Napoleon, who professed no faith himself and was utterly Machiavellian in practice, saw the necessity of religion for the masses: “Men who do not believe in God—one does not govern them, one shoots them.”<sup>458</sup> Certainly, it would be safe to conclude that the

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453. Robert E. Brown, *Charles Beard and the Constitution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956).

454. Forrest McDonald, *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

455. René de Visme Williamson, *Independence and Involvement: A Christian Reorientation in Political Science* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 223.

456. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), 44.

457. Williamson, *Independence and Involvement*, 222–23.

“Faith of our Fathers” was a potent influence in the founding of this nation, even if some of them were not Christian either in their theology or in their personal lives. There was still enough “salt” in the fabric of society to insure the general acceptance of essentially Christian standards in the life of the nation. The voters were not Deists.

One of the statesmen who first saw clearly the uniqueness of the American Revolution, because of its philosophical and theological foundations, was Edmund Burke, M.P. (Member of Parliament). By way of contrast, writers have often remarked also that Burke was the first man of stature in the West who knew from the beginning that the French Revolution would end in tragedy:

Endowed with a prophet’s genius, he marvelously foresaw the course of events.... The Revolution, after careening fiercely through a series of stages of hysterical violence, would end in a despotism; but by that time, it would have brought down in ruin most that was lovely and noble....<sup>459</sup>

Now this is not an idea that suddenly occurred to Burke after the guillotine began to operate, but something he sensed twenty years before the fall of the Bastille. He first expressed his concern in 1769, saying that the English “must hourly look for some extraordinary convulsion in that whole system; the effect of which on France, and even on all Europe, it is difficult to conjecture.” After visiting France a little later and talking with the *philosophes* and “enlightened” political theorists who were quite the fashion in those days, he returned to England and told Parliament (1773) that these French notions would “degrade us into brutes.” He was certain that “the most horrid and cruel blow that can be offered to civil society is through atheism.” Under the impact of their wild theories, he saw “some {176} of the props of good government already begin to fall.”<sup>460</sup> Those who think Burke opposed the French Revolution only because he was getting old and conservative (he was sixty in 1789), simply have not read Burke. He

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458. Robert B. Holtman, *The Napoleonic Revolution* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1967), 121.

459. Russell Kirk, ed., *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1955), 2–3.

460. Peter J. Stanlis, ed., *Edmund Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1963), 418.

saw from the beginning that French secular thinking would lead to disaster, that ideas do “have consequences.” After the fall of the Bastille, he composed his classic essay, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in which he tells us: “The age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.”<sup>461</sup> He saw that a fundamental change in the “worldview” of what had been Christian civilization was in the making, and he saw where this pagan philosophy would lead. However, he felt that the emerging nation on this side of the Atlantic was still sound.

To get the full impact of Burke’s rejection of French political philosophy and its outworking in practice, one must remember how warmly sympathetic he was with Americans and their Revolution. Burke was elected to Parliament late in 1765, just as tension with the colonies was beginning to build. Earlier that year, the Stamp Act had been passed and a year later abolished under heavy pressure from America. It was Burke’s own party, the Rockingham Whigs, which repealed the odious tax during their brief time in power, but the government of George III was not prepared to let the rebellious colonists have their own way. Burke promptly put himself on record as favoring the Americans. In a series of pamphlets and parliamentary addresses he tried to point out to the English the error of their ways and suggest how they might avoid trouble. On March 22, 1775, less than a month before the Battles of Lexington and Concord, he gave his famous speech on “Conciliation with the Colonies.” Yet it was during this same decade, while Burke was courageously defending the Americans, that he first became deeply concerned over the ominous developments in France. Few were aware of the danger, even much later. Thomas Jefferson<sup>462</sup> wrote to a friend in 1816—*after* the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and Waterloo—asking, “But who in 1785 could foresee the rapid depravity which was to render the close of the century the disgrace of the history of man?” Burke saw this, not in 1785 but in 1769. Many of my fellow Americans have not grasped this point in political theory even by the time of our Bicentennial.

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461. Kirk, *Reflections*, 111.

462. Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus the City* (New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1962), 29.

If the French Revolution was quite different from the American Revolution, the uprisings “south of the border” in the early decades of the last century did not follow our pattern either. Nor is this Yankee bias. Bolivar, {177} the “George Washington of South America,” quickly concluded that the liberated peoples needed a dictator. He died in 1830 at the age of forty-seven, an exhausted and disillusioned idealist, now in exile. Some months before his death he wrote:

There is no good faith in [Latin] America, nor among the nations of [Latin] America. Treaties are scraps of paper; constitutions, printed matter; elections, battles; freedom, anarchy; and life a torment.<sup>463</sup>

Shortly before his death he added, “[Latin] America is ungovernable. He who serves a revolution ploughs the sea.” Certainly the country which bears his name, Bolivia, has confirmed his worst fears. Bolivia had sixty revolts, ten constitutions, and six presidents assassinated between 1826 and 1898. Their Andean neighbors have not done much better.<sup>464</sup> The more recent communist revolutions in Russia, China, and Cuba have been politically more stable, but at a frightful cost in human life—any potential dissent has been liquidated. Nevertheless, Marxism seems to have a great fascination for many Latin Americans, particularly intellectuals. Perhaps the best way to sum up this tragic record of human failure may be a dictum of William Penn: “If men will not be governed by God, then they must be governed by tyrants.”

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463. George Pendle, *A History of Latin America* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 109.

464. C. Northcote Parkinson, *The Evolution of Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1958), 256.

# THE ROCK FROM WHICH AMERICA WAS HEWN

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*E. L. Hebden Taylor*

A Bicentennial Convocation address delivered at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa, on April 20, 1976. The speech has been shortened for publication.

*“Look to the rock from which you were cut, and to the quarry from which you were hewn” (Isaiah 51:1).*

Many Americans in this bicentennial year falsely suppose that their nation was founded in 1776, and they choose to ignore the first 169 years of their nation’s history. Yet it was in the first colonial period of her history that the foundations of America were laid. The builders of early colonial America consciously looked to the Bible for guidance as they sought to create a new society more in harmony with their biblical convictions than the old societies they had left in Europe.

For this reason American Christians would do well during this bicentennial year to look to the biblical rock from which their nation was hewn. Without such retrospect into our past, no real prospect is possible for our future. In this respect American Christians today are like the biblical Israelites, who needed to remind themselves in every period of crisis of their great deliverance from Egypt, of their wanderings in the wilderness, and of their ancient covenant with Jehovah, not only that they might find consolation but even more that they might find direction. Whenever the Israelites reflected upon their glorious past, they gained new insight into God’s guidance of their way, a new understanding of the purpose of their existence as a nation, and a new courage for continued progress down the ages of time. Even so, in this bicentennial year of our existence as an independent nation, American Christians need to look to the biblical rock from which their nation was cut and the quarry from which it was hewn.



If they do so they will discover that our founding Puritan forefathers loved to compare the new nation they were seeking to build with the old Israel of God. Let us then like them follow through upon this analogy.

### *Both Ancient Israel and Early Christian America Began with a Great Exodus*

Like the ancient people of Israel, our American nation was founded by people seeking to escape from the bondage of the Old World of Europe. Just as Pharaoh of Egypt deprived the Israelites of their freedom to worship {179} and to serve God according to God's own Word in the Bible, so the rulers of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tried to deprive our Christian founding fathers and mothers of their right to worship the God of the Bible. Unlike the conquerors of South America, the Pilgrim Fathers came to North America in search of God rather than gold. As Richard Niebuhr points out in his classic study of early Christian America, *The Kingdom of God in America*:

The hope of the Puritans who came to America was the establishment of theocracy [God's rule]. But, taken literally, the establishment of theocracy was not the hope of the Puritans only. It was no less the desire of Pilgrims in Plymouth, of Roger Williams in Rhode Island, of the Quakers in the middle colonies, of German sectarians in Pennsylvania, of the Dutch Reformed in New York, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of a later immigration.

In his great work, *Democracy in America*, Alexis De Tocqueville also noted this connection between religion and liberty in America. He wrote :

I have said enough to put the character of Anglo-American civilization in its true light. It is the result of two distinct elements, which in other places have been in frequent disagreement, but which the Americans have succeeded in incorporating to some extent with one another and combining admirably.

I allude to the *spirit of religion* and the *spirit of liberty*.

The settlers of New England were at the same time ardent sectarians and daring innovators. Narrow as the limits of some of their religious opinions were, they were free from all political prejudices. Hence arose two tendencies, distinct but opposite, which are everywhere discernible in the manners as well as the laws of the country. Liberty

regards religion as its companion in all its battles and triumphs, as the cradle of its infancy and the divine source of its claims. It considers religion as the safeguard of morality, and morality as the best security of law and the surest pledge of the duration of freedom.

### *The Limitation of Political Power in Ancient Israel and Early America*

Like the ancient Israelites, the early Americans placed limits upon the earthly political power, since both peoples acknowledged only the Lord God as absolute and ultimate sovereign. This followed from the great principle of religious freedom to worship the one true God. If the secular government has no right to interfere with the religious lives of its subjects, then there is a department of social life over which the political authority as such has no legal competence. It lies forever beyond the State's authority. Democracy, as we understand the term in these United States, means the denial of the omnicompetence of the power of government. The opposite of our type of democracy is, therefore, totalitarianism, which rests on the {180} claim of the State to have rightful authority over every department of human life—in effect, the claim to be sovereign or God. The recognition of the principle of religious freedom from political control also implied, in principle, the freedom of all cultural activities from governmental control. It implied (and achieved in the course of two centuries) freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, freedom of learning, and of art and science and literature—in short, all that is involved in the freedom of the mind. As John Macmurray points out in *Constructive Democracy*:

The implications of religious toleration run through all our democratic liberties—freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of the press, of cultural association, of public criticism and propaganda. For it accepts the principle that the man is more than the citizen, and that the state is merely an aspect, and not the most important aspect of the community.

It was to secure such freedoms that the thirteen American colonies enunciated the great Declaration of Independence in 1776. It was to refute the claim of the British government to be sovereign over them that the colonists fought the American War of Independence. Rousas John Rushdoony points out in *This Independent Republic* that:

The doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty and absolutism was fought by the American Revolution as legally and morally wrong. Although some references to popular sovereignty are to be found in the constitutional records, these statements have reference to *political* sovereignty. *Legal* sovereignty was definitely denied, and the people themselves, although granted suffrage, were distrusted. By this distrust no aristocratic temper was displayed: there was distrust of all classes, and a feeling that restraints upon the power of all were necessary. The background to this distrust of sovereignty was both early medieval and Calvinist. Political Calvinism had affirmed, as its battle-cry, such statements as “The Crown Rights of King Jesus,” and “To God alone belongs dominion.”

The Christian, Western tradition in America was hostile to the doctrine of sovereignty and affirmed, with reference to the civil order, the doctrine of *limited power*. This meant, first, a *division* of powers, which naturally implied, second, a *multiplicity* of powers, and third, a *complexity* of powers.

### *A Government of Laws Not of Men*

To establish such a limited system of government, the Americans agreed upon a federal system of government which divided up political power between the federal government and the various states, both being held responsible to the Constitution and the common law. As Israel of old was founded upon the covenant made with God at Sinai, so our nation was established by a compact among the thirteen colonies based upon the Constitution. Whatever else our Constitution achieved, it established the principle {181} of the limitation of power. Henceforth America, unlike England, was to enjoy a system of “divided sovereignty of government,” as M. J. C. Vile calls it in *The Structure of American Federalism*.

The principle of limitation of power was subject to abuse, and like all moral principles, it could be used for self-defense, but it was also used for self-criticism and self-limitation. In many ways this doctrine—that God alone is sovereign over America and that therefore all human exercise of power needs to be limited—became a profound influence in American life, even when its sources were forgotten. Lord Bryce wrote in his classic work, *The American Commonwealth*:

Someone has said that the American government and Constitution are based on the theology of Calvin and the philosophy of Hobbes.

This at least is true, that there is a hearty Puritanism in the view of human nature which pervades the instrument of 1787. It is the work of men who believed in original sin, and were resolved to leave open for transgressors no door which they could possibly shut.... The aim of the Constitution seems to be not so much to attain great common ends by securing a good government as to avert the evils which will flow, not merely from a bad government, but from any government strong enough to threaten the pre-existing communities of the individual citizen.

Bryce is probably right in emphasizing the importance of the negative idea of original sin, but this idea is inseparable from the conviction that God alone is truly sovereign over men and nations and that human power not only must but can be limited in the kingdom of God. Henry Adams pointed out in his *History of the United States during the Administration of Thomas Jefferson* in regard to the Quaker contribution to the American nation :

To politics, the Pennsylvanians did not take kindly. Perhaps their democracy was so deep an instinct that they knew not what to do with political power when they gained it; as though political power were aristocratic in its nature, and democratic power a contradiction in terms.

It was, I suspect, not an instinct of democracy but the *social heritage* derived from Quakers and other sectarians which asserted itself in the Pennsylvania spirit. These groups recognized that legal power is necessary for curbing unregenerate power, and therefore agreed to civil power; but since the exercise of power tends to corrupt men and make them usurpers of God's sovereignty, the lust for power needed to be eliminated at its source. Bryce and Adams suggest how differently the Calvinists and the Quakers employed the principle of the limitation of power, but also how much they agreed on the idea itself. The Puritan sought limitation by means of constitutionalism, the Scriptures, "political covenants," and the dispersion of power, whereas the Separatist and the Quaker sought it by learning {182} the humility of Christ. Though both ways led to a kind of democracy, it was not the French revolutionary type of democracy which marched under the banner of the sovereignty of man. It was Christian democracy subject to the kingdom and rule of Almighty God.

### ***Both Ancient Israel and Early America Had a Future Orientation***

The United States, like Palestine of old, was settled by men and women who, however humble their British or European origins, were *upper class* by virtue of their vision of the future. They came to these shores determined to build God's kingdom in America. They left their homelands in terms of a future-oriented vision to build holy commonwealths in the New World, in which God's law would be obeyed.

The Reformed faith, which believes in God's sovereignty over every aspect of human life, is bound to be future oriented. No other religion has been so capable of creating such progress in science, technology, and industry as has Calvinism, because none other has had the future orientation of biblical faith.

Future-oriented people capitalize a civilization; they work and save in terms of a future goal. They save their money and forego present pleasures for future gains. Their entire activity is geared to capitalization and investment, and the Christian family becomes the major instrument for capitalizing society. It is this future orientation of our founding forebears which explains why the United States has achieved the highest standard of living of any people in history. Edward Banfield, in *The Unheavenly City*, refers to this factor in the building of the world's first truly modern nation in these terms:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the free population of the United States was predominantly middle class. Most were descendants of English and American yeomen, artisans, and tradesmen, a stratum of society that had long had good opportunities to better its condition and had been confident of its ability to do so. The native American inherited a culture that gave prominent place to the future-oriented virtues of self-discipline and denial, industry, thrift, and respect for law and order. He was sure that these virtues would be rewarded by success; he expected to "get on" and to "improve himself" in material and other ways. The Puritans had come to America with the intention of establishing ideal communities— "a city upon a hill"—and the millennial impulse, still powerful, took many forms in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the towns and cities, most early Americans, especially those of English origin, were skilled craftsmen or tradesmen. Of the few in New England who were day laborers, nearly all could read and write and nearly all voted.

It was men and women inspired with this vision of building God's kingdom and creating a "sanctified society" who provided the dynamic for the tremendous expansion which took place in the United States during the {183} nineteenth century. Niebuhr reminds us in *The Kingdom of God in America* that the principle of limitation also applied in the economic realm. He writes :

In recent years the thesis that Protestantism was the nurse if not the parent of capitalism has been widely adopted. Yet the distinction between the Protestant principle of the kingdom of God and the principle of laissez faire economics is quite as great and of the same sort as the difference between the former and the ideal of political liberalism. The faith in the kingdom did not demand that unconverted man with his lust for power and gain be liberated, but rather that he be brought into willing subjection to the rule of God. Atheism of the practical sort found in Deism needed to intervene before this idea could be confounded with economic liberalism.... The spirit of (secular) capitalism and the spirit of Protestantism remain two wholly different things.... It yet remains true that while the principle was recognized as applicable to economics it was not implemented as was the case in the political and ecclesiastical spheres, where the dispersion and balancing of power provided for more than internal restraint.... The principle of divine sovereignty, not the idea of economic autonomy, remained the rule of Protestants here as elsewhere.... In these ways then, through insistence upon constitutionalism, upon the primacy and independence of the church, and upon the limitation of all human power, the faith in the Kingdom of God became a constructive thing in early America. It brought forth a movement which had definite meaning and character despite the rich variety of its manifestations.

***America, like Ancient Israel, Has Broken Her Covenant  
with God and May Now Expect His Terrible Judgment  
Unless She Repents of Her Evil Ways***

By selling out to the false gods of, first, deism in the eighteenth century, then *laissez-faire* individualism, and later collectivism in the twentieth century, God's rule over the nation has been replaced by the tyranny of the majority and of various elites. Instead of educating the nation's children in the knowledge and fear of the Lord, as they used to do in Puritan days, now the children are taught to worship togetherness without God, and the Supreme Court seeks to integrate them into the apostate and civil religion of the apostate humanists. Instead of

finding in God's Word the key to human knowledge and science, our apostate universities and colleges try to make man's reason and scientific method supreme. With the breakdown of Calvinism in America, it is not surprising to find that the nation has turned its back upon the Protestant ethic of hard work and thrift and instead has become present-oriented. The majority now subscribes to a view of life in which the present moment is decisive, epitomized in the remark of Lord Keynes, "In the long run we shall all be dead." No wonder the federal government follows Keynesian fiscal policies of deficit financing and an ever-larger national debt. {184}

The United States today is coming under the judgments of the sovereign God of the Bible who through His Son warns us, "Unto whomsoever much is given of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).

The Lord's judgments are apparent in the people's alienation from their own government as a result of the scandals of Watergate, in their apathy with politics, in their overextended use of credit, in the rising abortion and divorce rates, and above all in the growing power and strength of the Soviet Union. Our leaders and intellectual elites, it appears, would rather become "red than dead." The exiled Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in his recent PBS TV interview originally given over the BBC TV network, says he would not be surprised by the sudden and early collapse of the West. He questioned how anyone can even use the word "detente" after Soviet and Cuban behavior in Angola. He says that the West has been abandoning its strongholds with such headlong fervor that it now stands at an abyss. Yet like the prophets of Israel who warned of the coming judgment of God upon Israel and Judah and were laughed at, so this new prophet of God is scorned and derided.

The time is getting short! Unless these United States soon repent of their apostasy and rebellion against the God who created them, then our nation cannot expect to be alive to celebrate her tricentennial in 2076, for by then America will be as dead as Babylon and the anti-Christ will have triumphed. May the Lord God awaken the consciences of Americans and bring them back to live by the great principles upon which this nation was founded. May God give us time for amendment of our evil ways. May God humble us and cleanse us of all those evil

doings which have defiled and blasphemed His Holy Name. May God save America before it is too late. Amen.



2.  
CHRISTIAN  
RECONSTRUCTION

# HISTORIOGRAPHY: THE “PROTESTANT ETHIC” HYPOTHESIS

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*Gary North*

Max Weber (1864–1920) is generally acknowledged as the outstanding social scientist of the twentieth century, a seminal figure who was responsible for setting forth a series of methodological and substantive issues that are still central concerns of contemporary social scientists. His most famous contribution, and the one which generates the greatest academic discussion outside the more restricted realm of sociology as a discipline, is the series of essays published in 1904-05, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>465</sup> A preliminary study, the *Protestant Ethic* was to serve as an introduction to a major investigation of the relationships between religious ethics and the process of rationalization, a process which Weber saw as strictly limited to the Occident. He hoped to discover through a detailed comparative study of the world's major religions reasons which could point to the causes behind Western technological rationalization: If the various cultures could be said to possess similar nonreligious parameters, as Weber believed was the case, could not the religious differences be said to have been the chief differentiating factors? Does Christianity possess certain features, organizationally and doctrinally, that can account for the West's unique experience, namely, the development of a rationalistic culture?<sup>466</sup> Herbert Luethy's summary of Weber's intellectual concerns is exceptionally lucid:

His great and questioning mind was never particularly interested in the facts of history, nor even in social and economic systems, but rather in the detection of the ultimate impulses behind man's attitudes and behavior. What he analyzed were not the hybrid and wretched forms of a historically realized society (in which such ultimate

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465. Translated by Talcott Parsons ([1930] 1958).

466. Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* ([1937] 1969), 2:540. Cf. Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber* (1968), 140ff.

impulses are never embodied in their purity), but rather in the abstract and chemically pure "ideal types" which should provide the essences of a civilization stripped of all the adulterations and accidents of actual history. His religio-sociological studies, and also his economic and socio-historical works, whether he is writing the agrarian history of the Ancient World or dissecting the Indian caste structure, are in fact always concerned with the one problem posed by the historically unique nature of modern Western civilization. And in this context the words *capitalism* or *spirit of capitalism* are used in a very particular sense: {186} they mean no less than the entire inner structure governing Western society's attitudes—not only in its economy but also in its legal system, its political structure, its institutionalized sciences and technology, its mathematically based music and architecture. Its economic modes of operation, works discipline, and accountancy methods are all regarded by him as mere *pars per toto* of a whole civilization type for which Weber's final word is rationality—a rationality which permeates all fields of social behavior...<sup>467</sup>

It would be erroneous to regard Weber's work simply as a reversal of Marx's assertion that the religious superstructure of a society is a direct function of the class needs of those controlling the economic means of production. Weber was not arguing that religion is the underlying force which produces, in some direct fashion, a particular economic system of production. He cannot be termed a monocausal theorist. The concluding remarks in the *Protestant Ethic* are straightforward: "But it is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history. Each is equally possible, but each, if it does not serve as the preparation, but as the conclusion of an investigation, accomplishes equally little in the interest of historical truth."<sup>468</sup>

Luethy's point may be exaggerated. Weber may have seen his task as in part historical, but insofar as his Protestant-ethic thesis is concerned, Weber's contribution is essentially sociological rather than historical. There is no narrative, descriptive or analytical, tracing the historical factors that carried forward certain elements of Protestant

467. Herber Luethy, "Once Again: Calvinism and Capitalism" (1964), in S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization* (1969), 88–89. On Weber as a constructor of ideal types, see Ephraim Fischhoff, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The History of a Controversy" (1944), in *ibid.*, 67–86, esp. 79–81.

468. Eisenstadt, *Protestant Ethic*, 183.

social ethics. He took what he regarded as a commonplace—the connection between Protestantism and capitalism<sup>469</sup>—and attempted to correlate similarities in *attitude* between early and especially later Protestants and the secular defenders of the capitalist order. On this point Luethy is correct: Weber was interested “in the detection of the ultimate impulses behind man’s attitude and behavior.”

What does motivate men? On the issue of economics, Weber stated clearly that “in the future as in the past it will be the interests of individuals rather than ideas which determine economic policy...”<sup>470</sup> When men {187} order their economic affairs, at least, they will not generally act in ways consistent with some broad idealistic system that is supposed to apply to men irrespective of their economic needs. But Weber was no Marxist; he did not seek to define “need” in terms of any single sphere of human existence. Human needs, like human history, Weber viewed as multicausal. Weber desired to correlate, for the purpose of academic investigation, two of these spheres, religion and economic life. He narrowed his investigation, not because only these two spheres are primary in motivating men, but because academic investigators cannot hope to examine all historical motivating factors within the framework of a single study.<sup>471</sup> Connections that are established can only be used as aids in understanding historical development; they are not substitutes for concrete historical investigation. Julien Freund’s comments throw some light on the use (and misuse) of Weber’s approach to historical sociology: “In brief, because his sociology is based on the concept of meaningful individual action and on

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469. On the earlier references to such a connection, see Rinehart Bendix, “The Protestant Ethic-Revisited,” *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 9 (1967):266–68.

470. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons ([1947] 1964), 298. This is an extract from Weber’s posthumously published *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, written after the First World War. A complete English translation is available under the title, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (1968), ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, hereinafter cited as *E&S*. The passage appears on p. 184.

471. Weber, “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science,” in Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, eds., *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1949), 50–112. Weber’s perspective is criticized by Alvin W. Gouldner, “Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-Free Sociology” (1961), in Maurice Stein and Arthur Vidich, eds., *Sociology on Trial* (1963), 35–52.

that of typical modes of behavior, it can help us to understand, in the light of history and general experience, in what sense we may anticipate certain probable consequences rather than others in certain given circumstances.”<sup>472</sup>

The historian must establish the degree to which certain circumstances are actually given. Even when historical parameters can be established, men’s motivations and the consequences of their actions cannot be said to be automatic. Weber, in short, was no fool; he knew the limitations of his historical sociology, for he knew the limitations of the human mind. Yet he pushed to these limits in his own work. Possessing an encyclopedic mind, his cumbersome style of writing reflects his passion for accuracy:

Every sentence had to be just right; quite particularly, he would not tolerate overgeneralization. So every statement is narrowed by a qualifying statement, which in turn is qualified again and again, and the main proposition is combined with its qualifiers and sub-qualifiers in just one sentence, which often enough is of such monstrous length and involvement that even a German reader does not find it easy to unwind the thread and hunt for the predicate.<sup>473</sup>

Basic to Weber’s studies was his distinction between what he called adventure capitalism and modern, rationalized capitalism. *Adventure capitalism* can be found in any number of economic societies. It involves such {188} profit-seeking activities as tax-farming, the financing of courts and wars through state loans, the sale of state offices to the highest bidder, piracy, and commerce.<sup>474</sup> All that is needed for such a form of capitalism is a money economy.<sup>475</sup> This type of capitalism is characterized by a dual ethical standard: one treats members of his own clan, religion, or guild according to standards of “brotherliness,” while dealing with outsiders in whatever way turns a profit.<sup>476</sup> “Absolute and

472. Freund, *Sociology of Max Weber*, 140.

473. Max Rheinstein, “Preface,” *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society* ([1954] 1967), vii.

474. Weber, *General Economic History* ([1927] 1961), 246–47.

475. Eisenstadt, *Protestant Ethic*, 58.

476. Weber, *General Economic History*, 261–62. Benjamin N. Nelson has used this paradigm as the foundation of his book, *The Idea of Usury* (1949), which is subtitled: *From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood*.

conscious ruthlessness in acquisition has often stood in the closest connection with the strictest conformity to tradition.”<sup>477</sup> This is a crucial point for Weber’s thesis: “The universal reign of absolute unscrupulousness in the pursuit of selfish interests by the making of money has been a specific characteristic of precisely those countries whose bourgeois-capitalistic development, measured according to Occidental standards, has remained backward.”<sup>478</sup>

*Modern capitalism* is something completely different. “Nevertheless, we provisionally use the expression of (modern) capitalism to describe that attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically in the manner which we have illustrated by the example of Benjamin Franklin.”<sup>479</sup> By lifting the barrier between “brothers” and “others,” modern capitalism infuses honesty in the economic affairs of different groups, while it brings the commercial principle into operation within the internal economy.<sup>480</sup> Profits are to be sought within the framework of a formally (procedurally) rational free market which encourages the organization of labor along economically rational lines. This is fundamental to the development of Western culture; “.. nowhere else do we find the entrepreneur organization of labor as it is known in the western world.”<sup>481</sup>

What, then, are the sources of this uniquely Western development?

Weber’s answer is not generally familiar to those who know him only through *The Protestant Ethic*:

The decisive impetus toward capitalism could come only from one source, namely a mass market demand, which again could arise only in a small proportion of the luxury industries through the democratization of the demand, especially along the line of production substitutes for luxury goods of the upper classes. This phenomenon is characterized by price competition, while the luxury industries working for the court follow the handicraft principle of competition in quality.<sup>482</sup>

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477. Eisenstadt, *Protestant Ethic*, 58.

478. *Ibid.*, 57.

479. *Ibid.*, 64.

480. Weber, *General Economic History*, 232.

481. *Ibid.*

482. *Ibid.*, 230.

This is hardly what one could call an explanation based solely on the {189} religious influences of theological speculation. In this passage, the "decisive impetus" toward the new economic arrangement of capitalism stems from the phenomenon of competition based on price changes, a peculiarly "rational" means of organizing production and distribution. It implies a more depersonalized economic system than the personalized production aimed at luxuries demanded by the aristocracy.

Only the West knows the modern bureaucratic state (or, he could write today, only the West and those nations that have imported Western technology). The modern state is built on a hierarchy of specialized officials, professional administration, and a system of law founded on the concept of individual citizenship. The city of the West alone has possessed this feature: citizenship is based on a personal oath rather than on clan membership. A drift toward secularization was implicit in the very nature of the medieval city, especially those in the north:

... for by its very nature the Christian community was a confessional association of believing individuals rather than a ritualistic association of clans.... While it is true that the medieval city retained cult ties and often (perhaps always) religious parishes were part of its constitution it was nevertheless a secular foundation like the ancient city. The parishes were not incorporated as church associations by their church representatives but by secular civic aldermen.<sup>483</sup>

The burghers desired to live under a special urban law which excluded all forms of irrational means of proof—particularly the duel—and therefore, Weber writes, "Formally the new urban law implied the extinction of the old principle of the personality of the law."<sup>484</sup>

Additional features characterize the rationalized culture of the West. Paralleling rational bureaucracy and rational law is rational science. "Finally, western civilization is further distinguished from every other by the presence of men with a rational ethic for the conduct of life." Here, of course, is the heart of Weber's thesis: "Magic and religion are found everywhere; but a religious basis for the ordering of life which consistently followed out must lead to explicit rationalism is again

483. Weber, *The City* (1958), 103; Roth and Wittich, *Ec&S*, 1246–47.

484. *Ibid.*, 112; *Ec&S*, 1254. On rationalized bureaucracy, see Weber, *Theory*, 329–41; *Ec&S*, 217–26.

peculiar to western civilization alone.”<sup>485</sup> By placing such importance on the medieval city, Weber made it clear that he regarded Christianity, obviously including Catholicism, as one factor in the West’s rationalism, but he endeavored to prove that it was Protestantism, and especially Calvinism and the sects, that carried out most consistently this “religious basis for the ordering of life.”

Weber did not argue that Protestantism brought forth formally rational, impersonal law; Roman lawyers were the leaders here, and through the {190} revival of canon law the Catholic Church furthered the revival of such legal rationality. Weber did not hesitate in drawing this conclusion:

Finally, and above all, after the end of the charismatic epoch of the ancient church, the character of ecclesiastical law-making was influenced by the fact that the church’s functionaries were holders of rationally defined bureaucratic offices.... Thus the occidental church traveled the path of legislation by rational enactment much more pronouncedly than any other religious community.... In this way, there arose that unique relationship between sacred and secular law in which Canon law became indeed one of the guides for secular law on the road to rationality.<sup>486</sup>

He was equally aware of the fact that rational accounting methods began to be more widely used by merchants a century before Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door.<sup>487</sup> Double-entry bookkeeping, which was in general use by bankers as early as 1400, did not, however, come into use throughout European business life until the eighteenth century, or so Weber argued.<sup>488</sup> In short, what Weber asserted was that the ethic of Protestantism, in the midst of early rationalized social and economic practices, compounded these processes, giving impetus to their penetration of all European society.

What was this ethic? Weber referred to it in the early essays as “worldly asceticism,” but in his later sociology of religion he called it “inner-worldly asceticism.” It is a view of the world which proclaims an absolutely transcendent God (a premise of only Judaism and Protestantism, he wrote).<sup>489</sup> This in turn demands that men subdue them-

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485. Weber, *General Economic History*, 233. Cf. note 46 of this paper.

486. Rheinstein, *Max Weber On Law*, 251; Roth and Wittich, *E&S*, 828–29.

487. Weber, *General Economic History*, 171.



selves as *instruments* of God and that they subdue the world for God’s glory.<sup>490</sup> To some extent, the medieval monastic communities possessed such a vision of God’s requirements for men, and they created highly rational, systematic production methods.<sup>491</sup> {191}

But an unbroken unity integrating in systematic fashion an ethic of vocation in the world with assurance of religious salvation was the unique creation of ascetic Protestantism.... This religion demanded of the believer, not celibacy, as in the case of the monk, but the avoidance of all erotic pleasure; not poverty, but the elimination of all idle and exploitative enjoyment of unearned wealth and income, and the avoidance of all feudalistic, sensuous ostentation of wealth; not the ascetic death-in-life of the cloister, but an alert, rationally controlled patterning of life, and the avoidance of all surrender to the beauty of the world, to art, or to one’s own mood and emotions. The clear and uniform goal of this asceticism was the disciplining and methodological organization of the whole pattern of life. Its typical representative was the “man of a vocation,” and its unique result was the rational organization and institutionalization of social relationships.<sup>492</sup>

Calvinism took the Roman Catholic ideal of the ascetic monk—a special layman or cleric removed from the affairs of the world—and placed it as the standard for all Christians in their daily activities. The

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488. *Ibid.*, 207, 211–12. This seems like a late estimate. Lucas Pacioli, author of the first treatise on the new or Italian style of bookkeeping (1494), offered some wise advice for prospective businessmen which would have been at home in *Poor Richard’s Almanack*. These are reprinted by Shepard Bancroft Clough and Charles Woolsey Cole, *Economic History of Europe* (1952), 81:

Where there is no order there is confusion.  
Every action is determined by the end in view.  
Work should not seem to you strange, for Mars never granted a victory to those that spent their time resting.  
A sage said to the lazy man to take the ant as an example.  
If you are in business and do not know all about it, your money will go like flies, that is, you will lose it.

489. Weber, *Sociology of Religion* (1964), 103; Roth and Wittich, *E&S*, 488. All other faiths reintroduce intermediaries—saints, heroes, functional gods—in order to accommodate the needs of the masses.

490. *Ibid.*, 159; *E&S*, 536.

491. *Ibid.*, 181–82; *E&S*, 555. Cf. Weber, *General Economic History*, 267.

492. *Ibid.*, 182–83; *E&S*, 556.

man who lives a religiously rational life fulfils his spiritual duty. As Weber wrote, quoting Sebastian Franck, “now every Christian had to be a monk all his life.”<sup>493</sup> Not only is every man a priest, but every man is a monk as well. The ultimate earthly goal is therefore the goal of Christian *stewardship*:

The idea of a man’s duty to his possessions, to which he subordinates himself as an obedient steward, or even as an acquisitive machine, bears with chilling weight on his life. The greater the possessions the heavier, if the ascetic attitude toward life stands the test, the feeling of responsibility for them, for holding them for the glory of God and increasing them by restless effort. The origin of this type of life also extends in certain roots, like so many aspects of the spirit of capitalism, back into the Middle Ages. But it was in the ethic of ascetic Protestantism that it first found a consistent ethical foundation. Its significance for the development of capitalism is obvious.<sup>494</sup>

The ideal, ultimately, is that of middle-class comfort; it was luxury which was condemned. “They did not wish to impose mortification on the man of wealth, but the use of his means for necessary and practical things. The idea of comfort characteristically limits the extent of ethically permissible expenditures.”<sup>495</sup>

In addition to the Roman Catholic distinction between the ascetic life of the monk and the daily life of believers, two other ecclesiastical teachings interfered with the establishment of an ethical rigorism comparable to that advocated by Calvinists. First, Catholics of the Middle Ages had modified the Augustinian belief in *predestination*, just as later Lutheranism was to abandon Luther’s commitment to the same doctrine. Weber saw predestination as a force for social transformation. Since God elects men to {192} salvation according to His inscrutable will, men may not rely on any earthly institution or practice to guarantee their future life. Unlike Calvin, who did not regard time spent on searching for signs of one’s salvation as well spent, his later followers could not resist the temptation to look for signs.<sup>496</sup> They came to the conclusion, Weber believed, that “in order to attain that self-confidence

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493. Eisenstadt, *Protestant Ethic*, 121.

494. *Ibid.*, 170.

495. *Ibid.*, 171.

496. *Ibid.*, 110.

intense worldly activity is recommended as the most suitable means. It and it alone disperses religious doubts and gives the certainty of grace."<sup>497</sup>

The Calvinist was fascinated by the idea that God in creating the world, including the order of society, must have willed things to be objectively purposeful as a means of adding to His glory; not to the flesh for its own sake, but the organization of the things of the flesh under His will. The active energies of the elect, liberated by the doctrine of predestination, thus flowed into the struggle to rationalize the world.<sup>498</sup>

Thus, Weber was led to this conclusion: "Brotherly love, since it may only be practised for the Glory of God and not in the service of the flesh, is expressed in the first place in the fulfillment of the daily tasks given by the *lex natura*; and in the process of this fulfillment assumes a peculiarly objective and impersonal character, that of service in the interest of the rational organization of our social environment."<sup>499</sup> The occupation or calling, by demonstrating one's salvation, aids in the process of rationalization: "This makes labour in the service of impersonal social usefulness appear to promote the glory of God and hence to be willed by Him."<sup>500</sup>

Calvinism, by its reliance on work as an outward sign of election, created a mental attitude favorable to impersonal labor—labor organized and oriented toward an impersonal market. Success in one's occupation, assuming that it was a morally sound calling (not usurious, gouging, or openly immoral, e.g., prostitution), could be regarded as a sign of election.<sup>501</sup> By encouraging men to seek economic profit in an impersonal market, Protestant theology acted as a corrosive element to the more personalistic ethic of the medieval world.

But it is above all the impersonal and economically rationalized (but for this very reason ethically irrational) character of purely commercial relationships that evokes the suspicion, never clearly expressed but all the more strongly felt, of ethical religions. For every purely per-

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497. *Ibid.*, 112.

498. *Ibid.*, 224, n. 30. Cf. *Ibid.*, 126–39.

499. *Ibid.*, 108–9.

500. *Ibid.*, 109.

501. Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 148, 252; Roth and Wittich, *E&S*, 527, 616.

sonal relationship of man to man, of whatever sort and even including complete enslavement, may be subjected to ethical requirements and ethically regulated. This is true because the structures of these relationships {193} depend upon the individual wills of the participants, leaving room in such relationships for manifestations of the virtue of charity. But this is not the situation in the realm of economically rationalized relationships, where personal control is exercised in inverse ratio to the degree of rational differentiation of the economic structure.... The rationalization of the structure of an economy always brings about a process of materialization, in the sense just discussed, and it is impossible to control a universe of objective rational business activities by charitable appeals to particular individuals.<sup>502</sup>

Priesthoods generally oppose the destruction of traditional, personalistic social structures, and for this reason, "It is not easy for authentic religions of faith to generate anti-traditionalist, rational trends of the patterning of life. In the nature of the case these religions lack any drive toward the rational control and transformation of the world!"<sup>503</sup>

The second great aspect of Roman Catholic theology which militated against the rationalized ethical rigorism of Protestant theology was the institution of the *confessional*. Weber made considerable use of this argument in his writings. The confessional implies that man has a mediating institution between him and God. Weber referred to this as "institutional grace."<sup>504</sup> When an individual or an institution has the power to dispense grace, this "has the net effect of weakening the demands of morality upon the individual [receiving it], even though the distribution of grace ostensibly works in a moral direction."<sup>505</sup> Why should this be true?

The vouchsafing of grace always entails the subjective release of the person in need of salvation; it consequently facilitates his capacity to bear guilt and, other things being equal, it largely spares him the necessity of developing an individual planned pattern of life based on ethical foundations. The sinner knows that he may always receive

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502. *Ibid.*, 216–17; *E&S*, 584–85.

503. *Ibid.*, 199; *E&S*, 570. In this passage, "authentic religions of faith" is translated "an emotionalist faith," i.e., Lutheranism.

504. *Ibid.*, 187; *E&S*, 561.

505. *Ibid.*, 188; *E&S*, 561.

absolution by engaging in some occasional religious practice or by performing some religious rite. It is particularly important that sins remain discrete actions against which other discrete deeds may be set up as compensations or penances.<sup>506</sup>

If sins are seen as discrete and treated as such in the confessional, the process of rationalization will be impeded, for men will not examine their whole personality and way of life. This follows because "value is attached to concrete individual acts rather than to the total personality pattern which has been produced by asceticism, contemplation, or ethically vigilant self-control and demonstration of religious fidelity, a pattern that may {194} constantly be determined anew."<sup>507</sup> Thus, Weber came to the formulation of his thesis which probably still stands as the classic statement of the implicit revolutionary characteristics of Protestantism:

... inner-worldly asceticism and the disciplined quest for salvation in a vocation pleasing to God were the sources of the virtuosity in acquisitiveness characteristic of the Puritans. Every consistent doctrine of predestined grace inevitably implied a radical and ultimate devaluation of all magical, sacramental, and institutional distribution of grace, in view of God's sovereign will, a devaluation that actually occurred wherever the doctrine of predestination appeared in its full purity and maintained its strength. By far the strongest such devaluation of magical and institutional grace occurred in Protestantism.<sup>508</sup>

The abolition of magic from the world is the very essence of what Weber calls modernism. Rationalization, above all, means the disenchantment of the world—the eradication of all mysterious, incalculable forces from the universe.<sup>509</sup> Christianity, but especially predestinarian Protestantism, was a major factor in this intellectual process of disenchanting the world.<sup>510</sup>

The kind of rationalization which brought systematic bookkeeping out of the narrow sphere of banking and into men's daily lives will inevitably produce wealth. Here is a basic paradox in Weber's writings, the

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506. *Ibid.*

507. *Ibid.* Cf. Weber, *General Economic History*, 268; Eisenstadt, *Protestant Ethic*, 116.

508. *Ibid.*, 203; Roth and Wittich *E&S*, 573–74.

509. Weber, "Science as a Vocation" (1919); H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (1947), 139.

paradox of Deuteronomy 8. It was as true for the monasteries as it was for the Puritans.<sup>511</sup> A religion of asceticism yields excess goods beyond traditional needs for consumption. It is this kind of paradox which fascinated Weber. A theology which, in the hands of Calvin, was essentially traditional in its economic outlook, contained certain premises that could lead to the destruction of a traditional, personalistic order. The limitation of one's consumption leads to an accumulation of capital.<sup>512</sup> Frugality which is {195} imposed for the restraint of evil leads in turn to a secularized worldliness, precisely what John Wesley had warned against.<sup>513</sup> The ascetic elements of Calvinism, secularized in part because of its own transformative effects in advocating a careful accounting of one's life and business along impersonal market lines, becomes a wholly new faith in the writings of Benjamin Franklin—the spirit of capitalism.<sup>514</sup> It has ultimately led to the “cage” of rationalization, the “mechanized petrification” of modern industrial life, a bureaucratized world which no longer is sustained by any religious ethic.<sup>515</sup> The medieval universe has therefore been destroyed, “unintentionally,” by the capitalist-favoring aspects of a traditional Protestantism.<sup>516</sup> This is the great paradox of Protestantism.

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510. Weber, *General Economic History*, 252, 265. Weber's ideal type of rationalism as the opposite of magic has been challenged by C. S. Lewis in his *Abolition of Man* ([1947] 1967), 87–88: “You will even find people who write about the sixteenth century as if Magic were a medieval survival and Science the new thing that came to sweep it away. Those who have studied the period know better. There was very little magic in the Middle Ages: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the high noon of magic. The serious magical endeavour and the serious scientific endeavour are twins: one was sickly and died, the other strong and thrived. But they were twins. They were born of the same impulse.... For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique; and both, in the practice of this technique, are ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious—such as digging up and mutilating the dead.” Lewis's novel, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), is an attempt to show that modern science seeks power through magical as well as scientific manipulation.

511. Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 218; Roth and Wittich, *E&S*, 586.

512. Eisenstadt, *Protestant Ethic*, 172.

513. *Ibid.*, 175.

514. *Ibid.*, 180.

515. *Ibid.*, 181.

### *Critics of Weber's Hypothesis*

A number of critics have called into question many of the assertions Weber made with regard to his thesis, beginning with Felix Rachfahl in 1909 and extending to the present, most recently Kurt Samuelsson and H. R. Trevor-Roper. The main arguments against Weber run along the following lines. First, the roots of capitalism and rationalism are to be found in the Middle Ages, especially in the Italian city states, long antedating the Reformation.<sup>517</sup> Second, it is sometimes simultaneously argued that the early Puritans, Calvin, and Luther were generally content to reproduce the teachings of the medieval canonists on economic matters. As Tawney wrote as early as 1926: "If the Reformation was a revolution, it was a revolution which left almost intact both the lower ranges of ecclesiastical organization and the traditional scheme of social thought."<sup>518</sup> Third, the nascent capitalist entrepreneurs were aided primarily by religious toleration and a growing secularism; where Calvinists actually controlled the government, there were few stimulants to the development of capitalist enterprises.<sup>519</sup> Fourth, the rise of capitalism and economic individualism {196} made possible the unlimited acquisition of wealth. This, in turn, forced a modification of Protestant teaching with regard to economic freedom. In a sense, this

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516. Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 220; Roth and Wittich, *E&S*, 887–88.

517. R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* ([1926] 1954), 76; Amintore Fanfani, *Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism* ([1935] 1955), 52, 160ff., 202; Kurt Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action* ([1957] 1964), 48ff.; Luethy, "Once Again," 95; H. R. Trevor-Roper, "Religion, the Reformation and Social Change," in Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze* (1969), 22ff., 30, 40ff.

518. Tawney, 132; Fanfani, 191ff.; Samuelsson, 48ff., 91; H. M. Robertson, *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism* ([1933] 1959), 14ff.

519. Scotland is the standard example of a traditional order which remained economically static after the introduction of Calvinism. Cf. Sidney A. Burrell, "Calvinism, Capitalism, and the Middle Classes: Some Afterthoughts on an Old Problem" (1960), in Eisenstadt, *Protestant Ethic*, 135–54; Stanislaw Andreski, "Method and Substantive Theory in Max Weber" (1964); *ibid.*, 56. On toleration and humanism: Fanfani, *Catholicism*, 97ff., 207; Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, 99, 104ff. (with regard to the Netherlands); Albert Hyma, "Calvinism and Capitalism in the Netherlands," *Journal of Modern History* 10 (1938):321–43; W. F. Wertheim, "Religion, Bureaucracy, and Economic Growth" (1962), in Eisenstadt, 265ff.; Tawney, *Religion*, 149ff.; Robertson, *Aspects*, [48].

reverses Weber's thesis: the capitalist spirit created the later Protestant ethic.<sup>520</sup> Finally, events external to the issues raised by Protestant economic casuistry were the chief motivating factors in European social change, e.g., alterations in trade routes, migrations of minority groups, the continual warfare, and the impact of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>521</sup>

No two critics are completely in accord with each other on all points, however. Amintore Fanfani, a Catholic and a socialist, believes that Protestantism's original conservatism was ephemeral, and that the Reformers unconsciously unleashed the forces of radical economic individualism, fusing with the forces of humanism to produce modern capitalism.<sup>522</sup> Liking neither Protestantism nor capitalism, he chooses to follow Weber on some points. Another fascinating discrepancy separating two critics is the issue of the impact of the Renaissance State. H. M. Robertson believes that the Renaissance State of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries favored the merchant and aided "the noticeable spread of the capitalistic outlook..."<sup>523</sup> Yet Trevor-Roper bases his whole thesis of the failure of progressive Catholic thought to extend beyond the Counter-Reformation on this same development, the rise of the Renaissance State. Its bloated bureaucracy was the retarding factor, the stifler of independent capitalistic ventures.<sup>524</sup> Also noticeable is the reliance upon Weber to refute Weber. He had covered much of the groundwork in his treatment of pre-Reformation capitalism, the earlier Protestantism's traditionalism, and the impact of secularism on society

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520. Typical is the statement by Robertson: "The doctrine of the 'calling' did not breed a spirit of capitalism. The spirit of capitalism was responsible for a gradual modification and attrition of the Puritan doctrine; and this attrition had barely begun in England before the Restoration," *Aspects*, 27. Cf. Christopher Hill, "Protestantism and the Rise of Capitalism," in F. J. Fisher, ed., *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England* (1961), a Festschrift for R. H. Tawney, 15–39.

521. On changing trade patterns, geography, and new discoveries, see Tawney, *Religion*, 262, n. 32; Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, 102ff.; Robertson, *Aspects*, 177; Fanfani, *Catholicism*, 211 (which he limits to the eighteenth century). On changes in state bureaucracies, see Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," in Trevor-Roper, *European Witch-Craze*, 46–89.

522. Fanfani, *Catholicism*, 199, 207ff.

523. Robertson, *Aspects*, 86.

524. Trevor-Roper, "Religion," 134ff.; "General Crisis."



of the post-Reformation period. Weber was also well aware of the fact that later Protestant thought was far closer to the spirit of capitalism than earlier Protestantism had been; this fact was basic to the very paradox of capitalism that had originally caught his attention.

Kurt Samuelsson's recent critique of the Weber hypothesis can be taken as a representative sample of much of the criticism. Puritanism was essentially {197} conservative and traditional, even medieval, in its economic outlook, providing no positive impulse to capitalism. It was status oriented, as medieval social ethics had been, with little or no encouragement given to upward social mobility. Furthermore, why did earlier predestinarians like St. Paul and Augustine fail to preach capitalism? Why were Dutch Arminians so successful in capitalistic ventures, not believing in predestination?<sup>525</sup> Individuals who were both Calvinists and successful capitalists did not display signs of being thrifty "inner-worldly" ascetics, while profit-seeking Catholics often advocated the same ideas of thrift and business honesty that Protestant thinkers did. Religious toleration and secularism were the forces that made modern capitalism possible. Thus, he concludes:

Weber's hypothesis of a direct correlation between Puritanism and economic progress represents a generalisation which, quite apart from the question of its factual basis, is methodologically inadmissible. The two phenomena are so vague and universal as to be incapable of evaluation by the technique of correlation.<sup>526</sup>

True, he admits, under the environment of wealth and trade, many churchmen are willing to praise capitalists. "But it is overhasty to infer from this that Protestantism and Puritanism created capitalism and capitalists, or were a necessary prerequisite of their rise to a position of dominance."<sup>527</sup>

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525. Weber was aware of this apparent discrepancy: "In Protestant Holland, the great and distinguished lords of trade, being Arminians in religion, were characteristically oriented to *Realpolitik*, and became the chief foes of Calvinist ethical rigor. Elsewhere, skepticism and indifference to religion are and have been the widely diffused attitudes of large-scale trades and financiers." Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 92; Roth and Wittich, *E&S*, 478-79.

526. Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, 148.

527. *Ibid.*, 152.

But Weber never asserted any “direct relationship” between Puritanism and capitalism, either historically or in terms of analytical ideal types. He only sketched possible parallels and interrelationships. He was too careful a scholar to deal in direct relationships between intellectual constructs like Puritanism or capitalism. The fact that only the final chapter of his *General Economic History* is devoted to the Protestant–ethic thesis is indicative of his unwillingness to overstress any single factor in the rise of modern rationalism. This denial of any one-to-one relationship has been a basic part of Weber’s later defenders.<sup>528</sup>

If the Weber thesis is to be made useful for historical research, then the recommendation of S. N. Eisenstadt should be carefully considered:

The major emphasis in Weber’s work on the sociology of religion in general and on the Protestant ethic in particular is not on direct religious injunctions about different types of economic behavior but on the more general *Wirtschaftsethik* of each religion—that is, on those broader attitudes inherent in the ethos of each which influence and {198} direct motives and activities. The shift to an analysis of the transformative capacities of different religions contains an additional element —namely, the possibility that, under certain conditions, a given religion may foster new types of activities which go beyond its original *Wirtschaftsethik* (economic ethic). That is, there may take place a transformation of the original religious impulses which may in turn lead to the transformation of social reality.<sup>529</sup>

In other words, Eisenstadt asserts, “What is required for this reexamination [of the Weberian thesis] is a shift of attention from the allegedly direct, causal relationship between Protestantism and capitalism (or other aspects of the modern world) to the internal transformative capacities of Protestantism and to their impact on the transformation of the modern world.”<sup>530</sup>

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528. Cf. the articles by Eisenstadt, *Protestant Ethic*, 8, 10; Andreski, “Method,” 53; Fischhoff, “Protestant Ethic,” 78ff.

529. Eisenstadt, 9–10.

530. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

### *Conclusion*

Weber was no monocausal thinker. He did not write about "direct causes" or "historically inevitable" developments. He sketched attitudinal parallels between seemingly unrelated systems of thought. He did not believe that ideas beget ideas the way that hamsters beget hamsters; he focused instead on parallel concepts that could, within definite social and economic parameters, be said to reinforce certain historical tendencies, e.g., secularization, bureaucratization, and rationalization. The parallels that interested him with regard to Protestantism were attitudes regarding thrift, work, profits, lending, systematic accounting, and so forth. His thesis lends itself to questions of historical continuity: How did Calvin differ from medieval social thinkers, and how was he similar? How could Benjamin Franklin have been the product of a culture established less than a century before by Puritans who hoped to build the Holy Commonwealth in the new colonies?

Weber's studies in comparative religious sociology were written in an attempt to explain the origins of modern Western culture. Other cultures seemed to possess similar geographical characteristics and economic resources, yet only the West brought forth a rationalized, technological civilization. Weber hoped that through an investigation of differences in the religious systems a beginning could be made in explaining the differences in cultural development. He especially wondered if Christianity could in any way be linked to the coming of technology, a question which has caught the attention of other scholars.<sup>531</sup> He looked to religious differences as sources of cultural differentiation, but not the sole sources.

A neo-Weberian scholar should investigate the following questions. First, what aspects of Protestant doctrine clearly can be differentiated from {199} prevailing Catholic opinion at the time of the Reformation, and what impact, if any, did these differences have on economic practice? Second, which of these doctrines, either Catholic or Protestant, actually took hold of large segments of the population? Third, which doctrines were held by innovators of all kinds, and did these doctrines differ from those held by the wider segments of the population?

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531. Cf. Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967):1203-7.

Finally, what external factors may be said to have promoted or stifled innovation and the doctrinal premises (if any) associated with innovation? For example, Robertson's point that Jesuits contemporary with English Puritans were writing similar economic treatises in France and other Catholic countries does not tell us whether these writings were actually absorbed by Catholic culture. Did they become a part of the motivation of Catholic innovators?<sup>532</sup>

What purpose is served by offering a categorical denial of the possibility of establishing, methodologically, any correlation between Puritanism and economic progress simply because, in Samuelsson's words, "the two phenomena are so vague and universal as to be incapable of evaluation by the technique of correlation"?<sup>533</sup> Any mental construct used for the purpose of classification—"civilization," "capitalism," "Protestantism," "progress," "historical stage"—will be difficult to define rigorously while at the same time maintaining some kind of contact with concrete historical data. If it had been Weber's task to demonstrate that the classification construct "Puritanism" in some way produced "modern civilization" automatically or inevitably, then Samuelsson's criticism would be well taken. But that was not what Weber was attempting to do. He in fact explicitly denied the possibility of producing such a concretely historical correlation:

The procedure of a scholar whom I too hold in high esteem is a good example of the manner in which the concept of "cultural stages" should not be applied scientifically. Concepts such as "nomadic," "semi-nomadic," etc., are indispensable for descriptive purposes. For research, the continuous comparison of the developmental stages of peoples and the search for analogies are a heuristic means well suited, if cautiously used, to explain causes of distinctiveness of each development. But it is a serious misunderstanding of the rationale of cultural history to consider the construction stages as *more* than such a heuristic means, and the subsumption of historical events under such abstractions as the *purpose* of scholarly work ... it is a violation of proper methodology to view a "cultural stage" as anything but a concept, to treat it as an entity in the manner of biological organisms, or an Hegelian "idea," from which the individual components "emanate,"

532. Talcott Parsons, "H. M. Robertson on Max Weber and His School," *Journal of Political Economy* 43 (1935):690.

533. Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, 148.

and hence to use the “stage” for arriving at conclusions by analogy...<sup>534</sup> {200}

Weber knew what he was doing. He was establishing useful comparisons of attitudes basic to refined mental constructs—constructs without which historical research would become impossible. An enormous quantity of data must be summarized, arranged, *selected* in order to produce even the most microscopic monograph. The constructs are useful in aiding the researcher to look at certain pieces of data and evaluate them, possibly—probably—modifying the very application of the construct as the research continues. Weber was offering a possible set of correlations between constructs; if such correlations are impossible, as Samuelsson asserts, then the writing of history is impossible, for it cannot be done without the use of such comparisons and constructs. There may, of course, be better constructs for certain historical investigations, but critics should know that they are really calling for such a *substitution*, and not for the abolition of the use of classifying constructs. Samuelsson admits as much:

Broadly speaking, there is some truth in the contention that the Protestant countries, and especially those adhering to the Reformed church, were particularly vigorous economically. Thus far we can agree with Weber. But the correlation is far from complete. None of the religions mentioned is characterized by such symmetry in terms of religious faith and economic progress as is necessary if correlations of this type are to be meaningful. So many important reservations have to be made that the hypothesis as a whole becomes untenable.<sup>535</sup>

But if it is the case that there is “some truth” to Weber’s contention, is it not mandatory that correlations should be attempted? Is not the systematic correlation of refined mental constructs the indispensable prerequisite for historical research? Samuelsson’s error—the error of most of the Weber critics—is in assuming that the correlation of ideal types found in Weber’s thesis was Weber’s final *historical* treatment of the correlations. It was not; it was only the beginning. Weber did not try to impose his correlations on a myriad of concrete historical documents, showing subtle shifts in faith or practice; he left that task to historians. As yet, no alternative set of correlations has achieved the acceptance of

534. Quoted by Guenther Roth, “Introduction,” *Economy and Society*, xxxviii.

535. Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, 102.

practicing historians. Until such a set is discovered and shown to be more fruitful in handling large masses of data, the Weber hypothesis will continue to be used as a useful classification device for some historical purposes. It will have to be modified at points or discarded in certain cases, as Weber no doubt knew, but until historians are omniscient and records are exhaustive, tools of this kind will be a necessary part of historical research.<sup>536</sup> {201}

It is because the Christian historian takes seriously the biblical account of man, law, and society that he can select the truly fundamental “ideal types.” He can turn to Deuteronomy 8 and find there a stage theory of economic growth that is extremely useful in sorting out the facts of economic history. God warned His people that conformity to His law would bring external prosperity; that this prosperity would tempt them to forget Him and explain their wealth in terms of their own accomplishments; that this moral rebellion would then lead to God’s judgment and the destruction of their wealth; and finally that this judgment should lead them to repent. There is a direct link, therefore, between a society’s willingness to conform its law structure and moral outlook to the requirements of God’s law and its external wealth. In short, economic growth can be related to morality. Weber’s thesis concerning the Protestant ethic and Western rationalization makes sense precisely because he began with the biblically proper “ideal types”: predestination, personal self-discipline, honest labor, moral honesty, and economic growth. The fruitfulness of his approach is related directly to the accuracy of his starting premises.

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536. Cf. Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History* (1969), for a thorough discussion of the relationship between historical data and integrating “metaphors,” especially the metaphor of development. As he writes: “History in any substantive sense is plural. It is diverse, multiple, and particular.... Many histories, many areas, many times! The mind boggles at the task of encapsulating such diversity within any empirically drawn formula or synthesis. It cannot be done; not empirically, not pragmatically. So we turn to metaphor and analogy.... Achieving the impossible is what metaphor is all about. From it spring religions, prophecies, and dogmas. From it also, as we have seen, spring world-views of the kind that stretch from Hesiod to contemporary Marxism. We could not well do without metaphor,” 240–41. Weber’s metaphor of progressive Western rationalization certainly is as good as Marx’s class conflict in making sense out of the history of Western civilization (itself a metaphor, as Nisbet argues).

The facts of history must be selected. Selection involves the use of categorizing principles. The Christian scholar should begin with those first principles provided by the Bible. He must devote himself to the study of the Bible in order to discover which biblical principles apply in certain historical situations. The secular historian has too many facts to deal with and too many possible mental categories to choose from in his attempt to find patterns in historical events. His selection of the categorizing principles is intuitive. The Christian historian has a distinct advantage: he can go to the revelation of the One who creates and orders history in man's task of historiography. He knows what man is; the secular historian, seeing all history as ultimately chaotic, does not.

**3.**  
**DEFENDERS OF**  
**THE FAITH**



## EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

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Reprinted from *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, edited by John M'Clintock and James Strong (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), 3:356–58.

Eusebius of Caesarea, the “father of Church history,” was born about 270. The place of his birth is not certainly known, but it is supposed to have been Caesarea in Palestine. Coming to Antioch towards the end of the third century, he there studied the Scriptures under Dorotheus. On his return to Caesarea he was ordained by Agapius, then bishop of that place. Here he became intimate with Pamphilus, a learned presbyter, who was head of a divinity school at Caesarea, and who had gathered many books illustrative of Scripture and theology, especially the writings of Origen. This friendship was lifelong, and from it Eusebius took the name Eusebius Pamphili. It was probably under Pamphilus that Eusebius imbibed his fondness for the writings of Origen. During the persecution by Diocletian, Pamphilus was imprisoned, and finally died a martyr (A.D. 309). Eusebius taught in the school of Pamphilus for years, but during the persecution he went to Tyre and to Egypt, where he himself was imprisoned as a confessor, and where he witnessed the sufferings of the faithful described in his *Church History* (bk. viii, c. 7, 9). Epiphanius tells us that Eusebius was charged at the Synod of Tyre (A.D. 335, where he sided against Athanasius), by Pothamon, bishop of Heraclea, with having shown cowardice during the persecution in Egypt, and even with having offered incense to idols. But the charge doubtless arose from party feeling, as it is not likely that he could, with such a character, have been made bishop in that age. In 313 or 315 he was chosen bishop of Caesarea, which see he administered with eminent success for twenty-five years.

The part taken by Eusebius in the Arian controversy has been the subject of much dispute. When Arius was deposed by Alexander, he enlisted numerous bishops in his behalf, especially Eusebius of Nicomedia, namesake and friend of Eusebius of Caesarea; and the latter

wrote to Alexander, bishop of Alexandria (two letters, of which fragments are extant), aiming not to settle the doctrinal dispute, but rather to show that the views of Arius were misrepresented. He sought to reconcile the contending parties, and this conciliatory, if not compromising temper, characterized Eusebius through life. The part taken by Eusebius in the Council of Nicaea (Nice, A.D. 325) is described by Valesius (Introd. to his edit. of Eusebius) {203} as follows: "In this greatest and most celebrated council, Eusebius was far from an unimportant person; for he both had the first seat on the right hand, and in the name of the *whole* synod addressed the emperor Constantine, who sat on a golden chair, between the two rows of the opposite parties. This is affirmed by Eusebius himself (*Life of Constantine*), and by Sozomen (*Eccles. Hist.*). Afterwards, when there was a considerable contest amongst the bishops relative to a creed or form of faith, Eusebius proposed a formula at once simple and orthodox, which received the general commendation both of the bishops and of the emperor himself. Something, notwithstanding, seeming to be wanting in the creed, to confute the impiety of the new opinion, the fathers of the Nicene Council determined that these words, 'VERY GOD OF VERY GOD; BEGOTTEN, NOT MADE; BEING OF ONE SUBSTANCE WITH THE FATHER,' should be added. They also annexed anathemas against those who should assert that the Son of God was made of things not existing, and that there was a time when he was not. At first, indeed, Eusebius refused to admit the term *homousios*, but when the import of that word was explained to him by the other bishops he consented, and, as he himself relates in his letter to his diocese at Caesarea, subscribed to the creed. Some affirm that it was the necessity of circumstances, or the fear of the emperor, and not the conviction of his own mind, that induced Eusebius to subscribe to the Nicene Council. Of some present at the synod this might be believed, but we cannot think it of Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea. After the Nicene Council, too, Eusebius always condemned those who asserted that the Son of God was made of things not existing. Athanasius likewise affirms the same concerning him, and, though he frequently mentions that Eusebius subscribed to the Nicene Council, nowhere intimates that he did it insincerely. Had Eusebius subscribed to that council, not according to his own mind, but fraudulently and in pretence, why did he afterwards

send the letter we have mentioned to his diocese at Caesarea, and therein ingenuously profess that he had embraced the faith which had been published in the Nicene Council?

After the deposition of Eustathius, A.D. 331, the see of Antioch was offered to Eusebius, but he declined the honor, probably in fear of tumult, and even bloodshed, from the excited state of the popular mind in Antioch. The conduct of Eusebius in this case greatly gratified the emperor Constantine, who wrote him a letter praising his prudence, and saying that he was worthy of being bishop, "not of the city merely, but of almost the whole world." In the later course of the Arian dispute, Eusebius, though theoretically orthodox, substantially acted with the Arians to a great extent. Even in his *Church History* he avoids even mentioning the controversy, ending his book with A.D. 324. He presided at the Council of Tyre, A.D. 335, summoned for the trial of Athanasius, and joined in the condemnation of that great man. The prelates assembled at Jerusalem, and deputed Eusebius {204} to the emperor Constantine, to obtain his approval of their decision, and he seems to have used his influence with the emperor to secure both the recall of Arius and the exile of Athanasius.

In his last years Eusebius lived in close intimacy with the emperor Constantine, who cherished the warmest esteem and affection for him. In A.D. 336 Eusebius wrote his *Panegyric on Constantine*. The emperor had assigned him the task of superintending the transcription of fifty copies of the Scriptures on parchment, for the use of the churches of Constantinople. This was the last literary labor in which he was engaged before his death, which took place A.D. 340.

From the general tenor of his life as sketched above, it is not to be wondered that Eusebius has been charged with a leaning towards Arianism.... Athanasius never expressly charges him with apostasy from the Nicene faith to Arianism, or to semi-Arianism, but frequently says that before 325 he held with Arius, and changed his opinion at Nicaea.... The testimonies of the ancients for and against Eusebius are collected in Migne's edition of his works, tom. i, p. 68-98....

It is in the field of Church history that the merits and services of Eusebius stand pre-eminent among early writers. He had large acquaintance with both Christian and pagan learning, and used it, if not with critical or philosophical skill, yet with patient industry and

with literary integrity. He was the first to collect the scattered annals of the first three centuries of the Church in his *Ecclesiastical History*, the most important of all his writings, which traces the history of Christianity from the advent of the Messiah to the defeat of Licinius, A.D. 324. In this work he rejects, with greater care than is usually attributed to him, the doubtful facts and fabulous narratives. And this is not his only merit. A living sympathy with the fortunes of Christianity, and earnest admiration for the heroism of its martyrs and confessors, inspires him throughout. "Others," he says in the beginning of the fifth book, "that compose historical narratives, would record nothing but victories in battle, the trophies of enemies, the warlike achievements of generals, the bravery of soldiers, sullied with blood and innumerable murders, for the sake of children, and country, and property. But our narrative embraces that conversation and conduct which is acceptable to God—the wars and conflicts of a most pacific character, whose ultimate tendency is to establish the peace of the soul." In Dr. Schaff's opinion (*Ch. Hist.* Vol. 3, 877), the *Church History* of Eusebius "gives a colorless, defective, incoherent, fragmentary, yet interesting picture of the heroic youth of the Church, and owes its incalculable value not to the historic art of the author, but almost entirely to his copious and mostly literal extracts from foreign, and, in some cases, now extinct sources."

In the eighth book of the *Ecclesiastical History* (c. ii) Eusebius states that it is no part of his plan to relate all the wickedness and dissensions of {205} the Christians before the persecution, or to name those who were untrue to the faith; adding, "we shall only, upon the whole, introduce those events into our history that may be profitable first to us of the present day, and hereafter to posterity." In the *Martyr. Palestin.* (ch. xii) he states as a historical principle that the "events most suitable to be recorded in a history of the martyrs are those which redound to their honor." Gibbon (*Decline and Fall*, ch. xvi) remarks that "such an acknowledgment will naturally excite a suspicion that a writer who has so openly violated one of the fundamental laws of history has not paid a very strict regard to the observance of the other." Certainly it is an error of judgment in Eusebius to hold back anything in his accounts. The Scripture might have taught him better; it does not omit the faults of patriarchs or saints. If nothing, moreover, is to be told of martyrs but

“what redounds to their honor,” one’s admiration of these honorable facts must be lessened by the fear that what is kept back might counter-balance what is told. The *principle* of Eusebius is here historically bad. But Gibbon attacks Eusebius still more strongly in his *Vindication of Chapters xv and xvi* of his history. Eusebius gives as the title of ch. xxxi, bk. xii, of the *Praparat. Evang.*, the question “How far it may be lawful to use falsehood as a medicine for the benefit of those who need such a procedure?” He begins the chapter with a citation from Plato (*De Legibus*, ii), as follows: “A legislator of any value, even if the fact were not such as our discourse has just established it, if in any case he might make bold to deceive young persons for their advantage; could he possibly inculcate any falsehood more profitable than this, or more potent to lead all without force or compulsion to the practice of all justice? ‘Truth, my friend, is honorable and permanent; but not, it would seem, very easy of persuasion.’” To this passage of Plato, Eusebius adds: “You may find a thousand such instances in the Scriptures, where God is described as jealous, or sleeping, or angry, or liable to other human affections, so expressed for *the advantage of those who require such a method.*” This is all that is said on the subject, and it may be interpreted to mean nothing more than that one’s statements must be adapted to the understanding of his hearers or readers. But the use of the word “falsehood” in the heading of the chapter shows that, in the mind of Eusebius, either there was no just appreciation of the difference between “falsehood” and “accommodation,” or else that his moral sense as to veracity had been vitiated by the ecclesiastical casuistry which even in his time had begun to show itself. It is easily to be seen, however, that Gibbon really misleads his readers by his statement of the case: “In this chapter,” says he, “Eusebius alleges a passage of Plato which approves the occasional practice of pious and salutary frauds; nor is he ashamed to justify the sentiments of the Athenian philosopher by the example of the sacred writers of the Old Testament.” This is not warranted by the passage, which is fully cited above. {206} We adopt, nevertheless, the remark of Waddington (*History of the Church*, ch. vi, ad fin.): “It was disgraceful to the less enlightened fathers of the second and third centuries that, even in the midst of trial and tribulation, they borrowed a momentary succor from the profession of falsehood; but the same expedient was still more shameful to Eusebius, who

flourished during the prosperity of the Church, whose age and more extensive learning left him no excuse in ignorance or inexperience, and whose great name and unquestionable piety gave sanction and authority to all his opinions. There can be no doubt, then, that the publication of that detestable principle in any one of his writings, however modified and limited by his explanation, must to a certain extent disturb our confidence in the rest; the mind which does not profess to be constantly guided by truth possesses no claim to our implicit submission. Nevertheless, the works of Eusebius must at last be judged by the character which severally pervades them, not by any single principle which the author has once only laid down, to which he has not intended (as it would seem) to give general application, and which he has manifestly proposed rather as a philosophical speculation than as a rule for his own composition. At least we feel convinced that whoever shall calmly peruse his *Ecclesiastical History* will not discover in it any deliberate intention to deceive; in the relation of miraculous stories he is more sparing than most of the Church historians who succeeded him, and seemingly even than those whom he has copied; and, upon the whole, we shall not do him more than justice if we consider him as an avowed but honest *advocate*, many of whose statements must be examined with suspicion, while the greater part bear direct and incontestable marks of truth.”

Of his *Chronicon* it has also been justly asserted, “that for centuries it was the source of all synchronistical knowledge of history in the Greek, Latin, Oriental, and Christian world, everywhere translated, continued, excerpted, and made the basis of the different works on this subject.” His panegyrical writings on Constantine, however, afford, with much that is commendable and historically useful, abundant proofs of the weakness of his moral fibre, and of his sycophancy in dealing with the emperor. But it is to his credit that he never used his influence at court for merely personal ends. When Constantine on one occasion at Caesarea asked Eusebius to demand a favor for his Church, he declared “his Church was not in need of any favors. The only boon he asked was permission to use the public archives to enable him to write a history of the martyrs, which favor was readily granted him.” Less important than the historical works of Eusebius, but nevertheless very meritorious, are his *Apologetical* writings, the most extensive in ancient apologetics. His

notices of the oldest mythologies in the *Praeparatio Evangelica* are a valuable storehouse for theologians and philologists. In the field of *doctrinal theology* (*contra Marcellum*) the writings of Eusebius appear to less advantage than in any other. They touch {207} upon the question of his time, the Person of Christ. In these writings, as in his practical life, he appears to waver between orthodoxy and subordinationism.<sup>537</sup>

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537. Rushdoony writes: “Every heresy in the church has been subordinationist in some form or other.” *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1968), 93. Rushdoony explores the statist implications of the doctrine of subordinationism—that Jesus Christ is subordinate to God in any aspect of His being—in chapter 11: “The Procession of the Holy Ghost.”

# 4. BOOK REVIEWS



# REVIEWS

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## *America's Continuing Revolution: An Act of Conservation.*

American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research,  
Washington, D.C., 1974. xi + 398, \$12.00.

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### Reviewed by John W. Robbins

This large book contains the texts of a series of lectures sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute—which in turn was sponsored by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to the tune of \$175,000—during the years 1973 and 1974. The lecturers themselves are leading lawyers, historians, sociologists, philosophers, and economists; a list of their names reads like a Who's Who among neoconservative liberals: Irving Kristol, Martin Diamond, Paul G. Kauper, Robert A. Nisbet, Gordon S. Wood, Caroline Robbins, Peter L. Berger, Daniel J. Boorstin, G. Warren Nutter, Vermont Royster, Edward C. Banfield, Leo Marx, Ronald S. Berman, Kenneth B. Clark, Forrest Carlisle Pogue, Seymour Martin Lipset, Charles Burton Marshall, and Dean Rusk. The addresses are arranged in the order I have listed the names, and my impression is that they were also generally arranged in descending order of quality. Whether or not the compiler intended that to be the result, it seems to be that way. While Dean Rusk refers to freedom as a “virus” (395) and opines that he sees “coming into being a family of man as an organic community—not world government—which will be rooted in harsh necessity rather than a sense of brotherhood” (398)—a most curious and revealing juxtaposition of contraries, Irving Kristol points out that

All revolutions unleash tides of passion, and the American Revolution was no exception. But it *was* exceptional in the degree to which it was able to subordinate these passions to serious and nuanced thinking about fundamental problems of political philosophy. The pamphlets, sermons, and newspaper essays of the revolutionary period—only now being reprinted and carefully studied—were extraordinarily “academic,” in the best sense of that term. Which is to say, they were learned and thoughtful and generally sober in tone. This was a revolution infused by *mind* to a degree never approximated since, and perhaps never approximated before. (7)

And while Dean Rusk states his support of the democratic idea that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed (394–95), and therefore his support for such things as the National Commission on Supplies and Shortages (392), the United Nations (389, 391, 397), and the Baruch Plan to turn all fissionable materials over to the United Nations (397), Kristol quotes James Madison to the effect that “there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust.”

Perhaps it is unfair to contrast Kristol with Rusk, but I think not. Why Rusk was included in this symposium is at best a mystery: he spends most of his time ignoring the Revolution and puffing his—and others’—plans for the future, the kind of future that the Americans of 1776 were eager to avoid. He seems to exemplify the mentality which Kristol speaks of, that of being “arrogant and condescending toward all ancestors because we are so convinced that we understand them better than they understood themselves....” (4). {209}

Lest anyone think that the reviewer has read only two of the eighteen lectures in the book, it would be wise to turn our attention to some others. Robert Nisbet defends the idea that the American Revolution was a genuine revolution, that it was not a conservative political counterrevolution, but that its “essence lies in the social changes involved: changes in such institutions as property, family, religion, and social class” (76). To substantiate his point he cites the abolition by the state legislatures of the feudal laws regarding entail and primogeniture. “There is no question in my mind,” he writes, “that a real social revolution took place” (89). (Nisbet maintains that “there was indeed a solid substructure of feudalism in the American colonies” [76], and not merely vestiges of feudalism.) Yet it seems to this writer that Nisbet, in the list of reasons he gives for why the American Revolution was temperate and restrained, includes several that undercut his theory that there was a real social revolution: the idea of voluntary association, which prevailed before and after the Revolution, the absence of any centralized locus of power either before or after the Revolution, and the absence of “any of the politically important class divisions that we find in Europe.” Whatever the case, Gordon Wood continues in the same vein as Nisbet, which no doubt explains why such a vacuous title was selected for the book.

Some of the other subjects discussed in the lectures are “The Pursuit of Happiness,” by Caroline Robbins; “Religion in a Revolutionary Society,” by Peter Berger; “The American Press and the Revolutionary Tradition,” by Vermont Royster; and “The City and the Revolutionary Tradition,” by Edward Banfield.

In conclusion, one thought: Kenneth Clark, in his lecture on “The American Revolution: Democratic Politics and Popular Education,” points out that

Not only Thomas Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers of the American Revolution, not only the architects of the French Revolution, but also Marx and Engels, even perhaps Lenin, and more recently Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and other fighters for racial and economic justice in America and throughout the world—all have been influenced by the seventeenth-century egalitarian philosophy of John Locke. (296)

If that be the case, and I dare say it is, then classifying the American Revolution as Lockean is, at best, a half-truth. The important question is why the American Revolution was so different from the Russian, the French, the Indian, and the Civil Rights Revolutions. That difference cannot be explained by appealing to something common to all, but only by focusing upon the filter that caused the Founding Fathers to select those ideas of Locke’s which seemed to them true, while rejecting other ideas that seemed false. That filter, may I presume to add, appears to be Protestant Christianity.

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***The Roots of American Order, by Russell Kirk.***

La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974. xvi + 534, \$15.00.

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**Reviewed by John W. Robbins**

In this, his most recent book, Kirk continues his traditional method of philosophical eclecticism, and the results, as always, are mixed. The book consists of twelve chapters, ranging from “Order, the First Need of All,” to “Contending Against American Disorder.” The second chapter, “The Law and the Prophets,” begins with a reference to Eric Voegelin’s historiography and his idea of the “leap in being,” an idea that can

be better understood if one substitutes the word “jump” {210} for the word “leap.” Nevertheless, Kirk overcomes this early obstacle and quotes John Adams to this effect:

I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations. If I were an atheist of the other sect, who believe or pretend to believe that all is ordered by chance, I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization. (17)

One of the better things about this book is that Kirk is more inclined to give the Christians—meaning the Calvinists—their due in the shaping of America than some other historians of the period. He starts out slowly by pointing out that

A principal difference between the American Revolution and the French Revolution was this: the American revolutionaries in general held a biblical view of man and his bent toward sin, while the French revolutionaries in general attempted to substitute for the biblical understanding an optimistic doctrine of human goodness advanced by the philosophers of the rationalistic Enlightenment. (29)

He retreats into higher criticism and neo-orthodoxy in his statements about 1and 2 Isaiah (33, 35); his denial of the perspicuity of the Bible (38); his analogy between the Bible and a compendium of great English literature (38–39); his distinction between two forms of history, the sacred and the secular, with the former being expressible only through “parables, allegories, and the ‘high dream’ of poetry” (39); his statement that the book of Jonah is parabolic (40); that “the Old Testament, a sacred history, ought not to be read as if it were simply an account of everyday events” (40); that the “historical Moses” is unimportant: what is important is the “figure portrayed by the scribes—the man who experienced a ‘leap in being,’ who was granted moments of transcendence perhaps comparable to Pascal’s” (40); that searching for the “historical Moses” would be comparable to searching for the “historical Don Quixote de la Mancha” (40). Kirk displays his pragmatism by saying that “survival and continuing relevance to the human con-

dition are the best practical tests to determine whether a body of belief is right or wrong” and that “all evidence for things beyond the five senses is imperfect” (43). He gets sidetracked into talking about a “Natural Law universally recognized” (44–45), presumably including the Communists, Nazis, and worshippers of Baal within that universe. He celebrates primitivism:

It is not altogether surprising that the primitive Children of Israel, in an Arabian desert, should have experienced profound moral revelations; for such insights are not unknown among the moral leaders of peoples who remain primitive to the present day. (45)

Kirk finally returns to the thought he began pages earlier and points out that

In colonial America, everyone with the rudiments of schooling knew one book thoroughly: the Bible, and the Old Testament mattered as much as the New, for the American colonies were founded in a time of renewed Hebrew scholarship, and the Calvinistic character of Christian faith in early America emphasized the legacy of Israel. (45–46)  
{211}

One need hardly point out that the American Calvinists did not entertain those ideas about the “legacy of Israel” that Kirk entertains; had they, we could not be writing these words here today. Rather, it was John Calvin’s understanding of the “legacy of Israel” that governed and dominated the thought not only of the New England Congregationalists, but also of the Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Baptists.

In the next chapter, chapter 3, Kirk discusses the Greek contribution to the founding of America, and concludes that “it would be mistaken to claim for them [Plato and Aristotle] a powerful direct influence over the minds of the men who made the American Republic” (73). “Indeed,” he writes, “Plato and Aristotle loom larger in the twentieth century than they did in the eighteenth, so far as Americans are concerned” (73). Perhaps that should give us a clue to the causes of the decline of America in the twentieth century, and to the impotence and inability of the conservative movement to stop the decline. The modern conservatives have not yet learned to beware of Greeks bearing philosophical gifts. John Adams once said that he had learned only two things from Plato, “that hiccoughs are a cure for sneezing, and that husbandmen and artisans should not be exempted from military ser-

vice” (73). Russell Kirk, by contrast, believes that the supreme Greek “leap in being” was “comparable to that of the Hebrew prophets” (81).

In the next several chapters, Kirk discusses the Roman, Christian, Medieval, Protestant, seventeenth-century, and Enlightenment contributions to the American order. “In the beginning America was Protestant,” Kirk writes, and that Protestantism “was intensely Biblical” (234). Yet Kirk’s sympathies lie elsewhere. He is taken with the “judicious Hooker” and his alleged demonstration that “we may know the Law Rational—accessible to our natural reason”; that this “Law of Reason prevailed, indeed, before Revelation occurred,” and, therefore, that God’s law for man is not only found in the Bible (243). The ideas Kirk loves best are not the ideas that founded America. Despite that fact, *The Roots of American Order* is a valuable book and a welcome addition to the plethora of bicentennial books.

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*Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge,*  
ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave.

Cambridge University Press, 1970, 1974. 278 + index, \$4.95.

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**Reviewed by John W. Robbins**

The conflict between science and the Bible, between science and Christianity, or between “reason” and “faith” in broader terms, is an old one. Ever since the middle of the nineteenth century and the publication of *Origin of Species*, Christians have been on the defensive. And they have been on the defensive because they have accepted and believed the myth that science furnishes truth. Sad to say, most Christians have not kept up with the battle and still cling to the idea that there are at least two roads to truth: science and Scripture. Consequently, they spend most of their time trying to reconcile science and Scripture in such a way as not to offend the “reason” of the natural man. In so doing—in accepting the premise that science is a cognitive enterprise that, properly pursued, leads to truth—these Christians have been doing a disservice to truth and to Christianity. Because most Christians have not read the account of the last battle, they have made almost no contributions to the fray, and the decisive and strategic

maneuvers have been made by the non-Christians. Books published by Christians have accepted in one form or another the idea that there are two means of learning truth—that is, {212} that science can and does provide us with truth, *in addition to* the Bible. But if one admits that premise, then one has implicitly given up the case for Christianity. For while it does not necessarily follow that because one method properly applied leads to truth, it will lead to other, or all truths, it does give epistemological standing to that method and establishes the right of its practitioners to demand that all other alleged truths conform to the “facts” discovered by their method. The battle between the Bible and autonomous science is, therefore, a total war. If one millimeter is allowed to science, it will soon take a kilometer. For that reason, any attempt to “harmonize” or “reconcile” science and the Bible as sources of truth is futile. If science be given epistemological standing, it will—and has the right to—demand that all other claimants to truth must bow before it. Science must be seen not as a cognitive enterprise, but as a manipulative enterprise. It provides not truth, but, at best, fallible directions.

Unbeknownst to most Christians is the fact that the two leading philosophers of science today, Thomas Kuhn and Karl Popper, have already conceded the fact that science is noncognitive. Kuhn, in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, has subjected science to a perspectivist analysis and destroys the view that science consists in the steady and linear accumulation of knowledge. Science, rather, is characterized by paradigms, and paradigmatic changes are revolutions in scientific thought, for successive paradigms are irreconcilable. “Neutrality” and “objectivity,” two of the putative qualities of the “impartial scientific observer,” are myths, for “scientific fact and theory are not categorically separable” (*Structure*, 7). Popper, in his *Conjectures and Refutations*, holds that science is just that: conjectural and refuted. No scientific fact or theory can be proved true; it can only be disproved and then only tentatively. He writes that “science has nothing to do with the quest for certainty or probability or reliability. We are not interested in establishing scientific theories as secure, or certain, or probable” (*Conjectures*, 229). “It can even be shown that all theories, including the best, have the same probability, namely zero” (*ibid.*, 192). And finally, “our attempts to see and to find the truth are not final, but open to improve-

ment; that our knowledge, our doctrine, is conjectural; that it consists of guesses, of hypotheses, rather than of final and certain truths” (*ibid.*, 151).

Now the book that this review is concerned with is a series of essays on Kuhn’s philosophy of science, and the essayists include such thinkers as Kuhn himself, J. W. N. Watkins, S. E. Toulmin, L. Pearce Williams, Karl Popper, Margaret Masterman, Imre Lakatos, and Paul Feyerabend. All the essays are good, but there is one outstanding essay by Lakatos that deserves the attention of all Christians. Lakatos, formerly professor of logic at the University of London, and now of the London School of Economics, titled his essay “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmers.” In this essay he presents an overview of the development of various philosophies of science, beginning with the view that science provides proven knowledge. He writes:

For centuries knowledge meant proven knowledge—proven either by the power of the intellect or by the evidence of the senses.... The proving power of the intellect or the senses was questioned by the sceptics more than two thousand years ago, but they were browbeaten into confusion by the glory of Newtonian physics. Einstein’s results again turned the table and now very few philosophers or scientists still think that scientific knowledge is, or can be, proven knowledge. But few realize that with this the whole classical structure of intellectual values falls in ruins and has to be replaced: one cannot simply water down the ideal of proven truth—as some logical empiricists do—to the {213} ideal of “probable truth” or—as some sociologists of knowledge do—to “truth by (changing) consensus.” (91–92)

Popper, Lakatos writes, has grasped the full implications of the collapse of the ideal of proven truth, and thus has arrived at the position that the proper scientific procedure is not to try to prove theories—for that cannot be done in any case—but to try to disprove them. One makes conjectures, in the Popperian program, and then specifies under what conditions the conjectures will be refuted. Science consists of conjectural or refuted theories, never proven ones. To the first position, that science consists in proven truth, Lakatos assigns the name “justificationism.” To the second position, that the proper scientific method is to seek to disprove conjectures, Lakatos assigns the name “falsificationism.” Since justificationism has been seen to be logically indefensible



(for all scientific procedures commit the *fallacy of asserting the consequent*),<sup>538</sup> the philosophers of science have arrived at the conclusion that “*all theories are equally unprovable*” (95, emphasis is Lakatos’s). Unfortunately, Christians have not yet grasped this point, and are carrying on an argument that the scientists already admit they have lost.

Many scientists and philosophers were unhappy with the conclusion that all scientific theories are unprovable, and sought to lower the standard from proved truth to probable truth. Lakatos writes:

Of course, replacing proof by probability was a major retreat for justificationist thought. But even this retreat turned out to be insufficient. It was soon shown, mainly by Popper’s persistent efforts, that under very general conditions all theories have zero probability, whatever the evidence; all theories are not only equally unprovable but also equally improbable. (95)

For the argument demonstrating that all theories have zero probability, I refer the reader to Gordon Clark’s *Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*, pages 62–64. With the demise of probabilism—a demise that could have been hastened if Augustine’s demonstration that one cannot know what is probable unless one first knows what is certain—falsificationism swept the field. And among the falsificationists, two schools emerged: the *dogmatic* falsificationists and the *methodological* falsificationists.

The hallmark of dogmatic falsificationism is then the recognition that all theories are equally conjectural. Science cannot *prove* any theory. But although science cannot prove, it can disprove: it “can perform with complete logical certainty (the act of) repudiation of what is false,” that is, there is an absolutely firm empirical basis of facts which can be used to disprove theories. (96)

Lakatos proceeds to show that dogmatic falsificationism is untenable because it rests on two false assumptions. The first of these

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538. The fallacy of asserting the consequent is one of the many logical problems science faces, but it is, perhaps, the most obvious and most damaging. It consists in arguing: if p, then q; q, therefore p. A simple example is: if it is raining, the ground is wet; the ground is wet; therefore, it is raining. Scientists argue in this way: if a theory is true (p), it will have a certain result (q). An experiment is devised and performed, and the predicted result (q) is observed. The scientists then conclude, quite illogically, that the theory is true. *All* scientific investigation commits this logical fallacy.

assumptions is that “there is a natural, *psychological* borderline between theoretical or speculative propositions on the one hand and factual or observational (or basic) propositions on the other” (97). The second false assumption is that “if a proposition satisfies the psychological {214} criterion of being factual or observational (or basic) then it is true; one may say that it was *proved* from facts” (97–98). Regarding the first assumption, Lakatos gives the example of Galileo:

Galileo claimed that he could “observe” mountains on the moon and spots on the sun and that these “observations” refuted the time-honored theory that celestial bodies are faultless crystal balls. But his “observations” were not “observation” in the sense of being observed by the—unaided—senses: their reliability depended on the reliability of his telescope—and of the optical theory of the telescope—which was violently questioned by his contemporaries. It was not Galileo’s—pure, untheoretical—*observations* that confronted Aristotelian theory but rather Galileo’s “observations” in the light of his optical theory that confronted the Aristotelians’ “observations” in the light of their theory of the heavens. (98)

Lakatos concludes from this and other arguments that “there are and can be no sensations unimpregnated by expectations and therefore *there is no natural (i.e.. psychological) demarcation between observational and theoretical propositions*” (99).

Regarding the second false assumption made by dogmatic falsificationism, Lakatos presents a conclusive argument:

the truth value of the “observational” propositions cannot be indubitably decided: *no factual proposition can ever be proved from an experiment*. Propositions can only be derived from other propositions, they cannot be derived from facts: one cannot prove statements from experiences— “no more than by thumping the table.” This is one of the basic points of elementary logic, but one which is understood by relatively few people even today. (99)

From these considerations Lakatos draws the quite obvious conclusion that science can neither prove nor disprove propositions: “all propositions of science are theoretical and incurably, fallible” (100).

One wishes that it had been a Christian philosopher who developed this argument; it is both embarrassing and annoying to realize that it is the Christians who are so oblivious to the development of the philosophy of science that they still maintain that scientists can discover truth.

The philosophers of science have handed us the weapons to destroy one of our most important intellectual antagonists—secular science itself—and we Christians are apparently too ignorant or too stupid to use those weapons. May God forgive us our intellectual sins.

To return to Lakatos, he is not content to let the argument end at this point. He goes on to offer a third reason why dogmatic falsificationism would be useless for disproving theories: “*the most admired scientific theories simply fail to forbid any observable state of affairs*” (100). Recall that dogmatic falsificationism requires that a scientific theory, to be scientific and not “*metaphysical*,” must specify *conditions* under which it would be *disproved*. But the best scientific theories do *not* specify such conditions; Lakatos illustrates the point by imagining a story about a case of planetary misbehavior:

A physicist of the pre-Einsteinian era takes Newton’s mechanics and his law of gravitation, (N), the accepted initial conditions, I, and calculates, with their help, the path of a newly discovered small planet, p. But the planet deviates from the calculated path. Does our Newtonian physicist consider that the deviation was forbidden by Newton’s theory and therefore that, once established, it refutes the theory N? No. {215}

The physicist simply says there must be an unknown body causing the deviation from the predicted path. If present telescopes are unable to discover that unknown body, bigger and better ones are built. If they are not adequate to discover the unknown planet, satellites are launched. And if they are unable to discover the unknown cause of the “*deviation*,” the scientists invent other reasons why the unknown body cannot be discovered. And so the process continues. It is not the Christians who postulate leprechauns behind every tree who become invisible if one looks for them, but the scientists; for as Lakatos says, “it is exactly the most important, ‘*mature*’ theories in the history of science which are *prima facie* undisprovable in this way” (102).

Lakatos is not satisfied with this conclusion, and he attempts to construct a sophisticated methodological falsificationism that escapes skepticism and irrationalism. He realizes how close to utter bankruptcy science is and tries as best he can—he is no mean logician—to rescue science from skepticism and irrationality. In this valiant attempt, he is not successful, and could not be. The noncognitive nature of science is

established once the justificationist position—the idea that scientific knowledge is proven knowledge—has been rejected. No amount of logical fine tuning of any variety of “falsificationism” can bridge the gap between opinion and truth. And Lakatos admits as much in his discussion of the decisions that must be made by a sophisticated methodological falsificationist, decisions that are inevitably arbitrary:

But even this appeal procedure cannot do more than *postpone* the conventional decision. For the verdict of the appeal court is not infallible either. When we decide whether it is the replacement of the “interpretative” or of the “explanatory” theory that produces novel facts, we must again make a decision about the acceptance or rejection of basic statements. But then we have only *postponed*—and possibly *improved*—the decision, not avoided it. The difficulties concerning the empirical basis which confronted “naive” falsificationism cannot be avoided by “sophisticated” falsificationism either. (131)

There is, then, no escape from the conclusions that autonomous science can prove nothing, that it can disprove nothing, and that, therefore, it is not a means of cognition at all. Scientists are, in the words of Paul, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of truth. The long essay by Lakatos (105 pages) is itself worth ten times the price of the book.

# PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

## VOLUME 4

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Volume 4 (1977) of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* will feature symposiums on “education” and “the family.” Manuscripts dealing with either topic are now being reviewed for publication. Anyone wishing to submit a manuscript for consideration would be wise to clear the topic in advance with the editor. Manuscripts should be between twenty and forty pages in length, typewritten, and double-spaced. The University of Chicago’s *Manual of Style* is preferred, though not mandatory. If accepted, *The Journal* will pay the author \$75 upon publication. Shorter manuscripts (under fifteen pages) receive \$35. Book reviews (five to ten pages) receive \$10; books dealing with the symposium’s topic are preferred. Suggestions concerning the reprinting of important documents or published articles, if accepted, are worth \$20, if accompanied by a clear photocopy of the recommended piece.

Manuscripts suitable for publication in the sections on “Christian Reconstruction” and “Defenders of the Faith” are always given careful consideration, as are suggestions for reprinting. Again, it is wise to clear the topic in advance with the editor. Summaries of dissertations are acceptable.

### DEADLINES:

EDUCATION: April 15, 1977

THE FAMILY: August 15, 1977

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# THE MINISTRY OF CHALCEDON

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Chalcedon [kalSEEdon] is a Christian educational organization devoted exclusively to research, publishing, and to cogent communication of a distinctly Christian scholarship to the world at large. It makes available a variety of services and programs, all geared to the needs of interested laymen who understand the propositions that Jesus Christ speaks to the mind as well as the heart, and that His claims extend beyond the narrow confines of the various institutional churches. We exist in order to support the efforts of all orthodox denominations and churches.

Chalcedon derives its name from the great ecclesiastical Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), which produced the crucial Christological definition: “Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man...” This formula challenges directly every false claim of divinity by any human institution: state, church, cult, school, or human assembly. Christ alone is both God and man, the unique link between heaven and earth. All human power is therefore derivative; Christ alone can announce that “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). Historically, the Chalcedonian creed is therefore the foundation of Western liberty, for it sets limits on all authoritarian human institutions by acknowledging the validity of the claims of the one who is the source of true human freedom (Galatians 5:1).

Christians have generally given up two crucial features of theology that in the past led to the creation of what we know as Western civilization. They no longer have any real optimism concerning the possibility of an earthly victory of Christian principles and Christian institutions, and they have also abandoned the means of such a victory in external human affairs: a distinctly biblical concept of law. The testimony of the Bible and Western history should be clear: when God’s people have been confident about the ultimate earthly success of their religion and committed socially to God’s revealed system of external law, they have been victorious. When either aspect of their faith has declined, they have lost ground. Without optimism, they lose their zeal to exercise dominion over God’s creation

(Genesis 1:28); without revealed law, they are left without guidance and drift along with the standards of their day.

Once Christians invented the university; now they retreat into little Bible colleges or sports factories. Once they built hospitals throughout Europe and America; now the civil governments have taken them over. Once Christians were inspired by “Onward, Christian Soldiers”; now they see themselves as “poor wayfaring strangers” with “joy, joy, joy, joy down in their hearts” only on Sundays and perhaps Wednesday evenings. They are, in a word, pathetic. Unquestionably, they have become culturally impotent.

Chalcedon is committed to the idea of Christian reconstruction. It is premised on the belief that ideas have consequences. It takes seriously the words of Professor F. A. Hayek: “It may well be true that we as scholars tend to overestimate the influence which we can exercise on contemporary affairs. But I doubt whether it is possible to overestimate the influence which ideas have in the long run.” If Christians are to reconquer lost ground in preparation for ultimate victory (Isaiah 2, 65, 66), they must rediscover their intellectual heritage. They must come to grips with the Bible’s warning and its promise: “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Proverbs 29:18). Chalcedon’s resources are being used to remind Christians of this basic truth: what men believe makes a difference. Therefore, men should not believe lies, for it is the truth that sets them free (John 8:32).

*Finis*